

*“The Earth
is the Lord’s”*

PSALM 24:1



*Called to Care
for Creation*

A PRACTICAL STUDY GUIDE

Change begins here!



WHAT IS NEEDED IS A RETHINKING OF
LIFESTYLE BASED ON RESPECT FOR
NATURE, RESTRAINT IN THE EXPLOITATION
OF THE WORLD'S RESOURCES,
REDEFINITION OF HUMAN NEEDS
AND RESTORATION OF THE DIGNITY
OF CREATED LIFE.!





I am writing these lines in the summer of 2021. The dominant topic in the news is, of course, the coronavirus pandemic. But that is not all. The issues of environmental degradation and social injustice keep popping up with astonishing frequency and in all shapes and sizes.

Just to name a few examples, in the past month alone, I have heard and read the following on television and in the press:

- ✓ that a team of researchers warns of the far-reaching impact plastic waste has on the environment and that while awareness of the problem is on the rise, the amount of waste continues to grow;
- ✓ of record-breaking temperatures in several countries: 33.6°C in the north of Finland, up to 50°C in Canada and western USA, and up to 45°C in Greece and other Mediterranean countries;
- ✓ of massive forest fires due to the long-lasting heatwaves in Canada, western USA, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Albania and Kosovo, and many large forest fires in Russia, which are often not even fought;
- ✓ of floods caused by heavy rain, which have cost people their lives in the west and south of Germany, in China and in eastern North Korea;
- ✓ that the two rescue ships “Ocean Viking” and “Sea-Watch 3” have once again rescued about 1,000 refugees from distress at sea;
- ✓ that an ocean current in the Atlantic has lost so much stability that researchers at the renowned Potsdam Climate Institute are worried that it may collapse—with worldwide consequences for the weather; and
- ✓ that the current global climate report states that it is now clearly provable that climate change is human-induced, that it is happening faster than feared and that we will not keep global warming within 1.5°C because we will have reached our global CO₂ limit as early as 2030 and not in 2040 as initially expected.

It seems Al Gore—who has long urged us to protect the climate—was right all along: “The earth has a fever, and the fever is rising.”

It is no wonder that—at least for young people in Germany—climate change and environmental degradation are the greatest social challenge of our time, as shown in current major youth studies.¹

IN THIS STUDY GUIDE

Although climate change, environmental degradation and injustice affect us all, they are not usually issues that we deal with in our churches and youth groups. This is a pity because our Adventist faith has so much to say in this regard. It basically urges us to make our own lives more sustainable and to promote a sustainable lifestyle among our fellow human beings.

In the following chapters, we would like to invite you to reflect on essential ideas and concepts of our faith in order to see how they influence our view on and commitment to sustainability; and whether we should see them simply as the spirit of the times or rather as God's will.

- ✓ In **chapter 1**, we will reflect on what it means not only to *believe* in Creation, but also to *encounter* the world as creation.
- ✓ **Chapter 2** is about justice. Is faith only about the question “How do I get to heaven?” Or does God also want us to experience heaven on earth?
- ✓ In **chapter 3**, we will consider the command to love our neighbour. This is, without a doubt, a fundamental commandment. But how does one show neighbour-love in a globalised world?
- ✓ **Chapter 4** is about our expectations for the future. Does it make sense for someone who believes in the return of Jesus to work for a better earthly future?
- ✓ **Chapter 5** gets down to the nitty-gritty: Why and for what purpose does the church actually exist? We need to answer this question if we want to find out whether or not sustainability is important to our community.
- ✓ **Chapter 6** may be shocking to you when we expose the often-heard excuse “There is nothing I can do about it” as little faith.
- ✓ In **chapter 7**, we want to inspire you to increase your sphere of influence in order to make a bigger difference.
- ✓ And in **chapter 8**, we will outline why the pursuit of social justice and commitment to caring for creation is not a distraction, but rather a very contemporary way of being light in this world.

“Adventist faith has so much to say in this regard. It basically urges us to make our own lives more sustainable and to promote a sustainable lifestyle among our fellow human beings.”



INTRODUCTION / 04

1

ABOUT THE
AUTHOR / 07

2

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST
OF THIS STUDY GUIDE / 08

3

CHAPTER 1
WORLD / 10

5

CHAPTER 2
JUSTICE / 18

6

CHAPTER 3
LOVE / 26

7

CHAPTER 4
FUTURE / 34

8

CHAPTER 5
CHURCH / 42

9

CHAPTER 6
MIRACLES / 50

10

CHAPTER 7
CHANGE / 58

11

CHAPTER 8
LIGHT / 66

12

FOOTNOTES / 76

13

CREDITS / 78



Contents



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bert Seefeldt (44) has been working as a youth leader in Germany for 16 years—first at the Conference, then at the Union. He has been interested in sustainability practically since birth. When he was in primary school, he decided to sell notebooks made with recycled paper at cost price. He would also politely ask car and bus drivers to turn off their engines when they stopped for long periods of time. As a West Berlin child in a divided city, he was acutely aware of the nuclear threat. Around the age of nine, and as part of the “Children Write Letters to Gorbachev and Reagan” initiative, he wrote a personal letter to both presidents, asking them to end the Cold War because he had learned of the devastating effects even a civilian use of nuclear energy could wreak from the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986.

Today, Bert is married to Nadine. As the father of Emma (7) and Luis (5), a just and sustainable world is—now more than ever—a matter close to his heart.



HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY GUIDE



TIP 1 / PRAYER

What is the most important thing you can do as you begin this journey on caring for creation? To invite God to be a part of it! Call upon the Holy Spirit to open your eyes to what you need to learn—and possibly change—regarding this important topic. You will probably feel challenged, even overwhelmed, as you go through this study guide, so ask God to be your partner. Ask Him to keep you accountable to Him about the way you live and care for creation.

Start a prayer journal where you write down the specific goals that you would like to achieve in caring for creation, and pray about them regularly, whilst taking the necessary steps. Step out in prayer and in faith, as you will see in chapter 7.

In each chapter, you will also find a *Prayer of the Day*, which aims to focus your prayer time on the topic of the day. This short prayer after the main text should get you started and prompt you to invite the Holy Spirit to act in your life in a specific way.



TIP 2 / ICEBREAKER AND CHALLENGE

If you want to get the most out of this study guide, pay close attention to both the *icebreaker* and the *challenge* of each chapter. Hopefully, the *icebreaker* makes the topic tangible for you. A group experience will be even more valuable because it will allow you to consider other points of view and learn from others. Immediately after the questions for reflection, you will find a *Challenge* that aims to encourage you to take action. Please embrace it! Because our world only wins when we move from words to action.





TIP 3 / QUESTIONS

The questions at the end of each chapter can be used for personal reflection or group discussion. We also hope they encourage you to ask more questions of your own. If in a group, always be respectful and loving towards others. Listen attentively and respectfully share your own views.



TIP 4 / FOOD FOR THOUGHT

We end each chapter with a *Food for Thought* quote and a final question. The purpose of this is to challenge you to take the topic a step further, to spend some time in deep thinking, making sense of all that has been said and done. The idea is to foster in you a desire to continually renew your mind with God's help (Rom. 12:2; 1 Thess. 5:21). Because, ultimately, it is your thoughts that will give way to your actions. Our hope is that you turn this practice into a habit.

This is also a great place for you to write down your final thoughts and conclusions on the chapter, to set yourself practical next steps and take note of specific prayer requests.

"The deeper one delves into the climate problem, the clearer it becomes that this unprecedented crisis of civilisation can only be overcome by combining faith and reason."

Hans Joachim Schellnhuber¹



Key Text

GENESIS 1 AND 2

ICEBREAKER

TO AGREE OR DISAGREE, THAT IS THE QUESTION.¹ What do you think about the world? Your mind is probably racing already, processing different images and emotions. The following statements are meant to challenge you into taking a position on various aspects of this question. Hopefully, this helps you answer the question more precisely.

Do you agree or disagree with the statements below? Mark your position on the scale.

In my daily life, I feel good about the world most of the time.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

I find that the people around me are friendly and positive.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

I'm optimistic about the way the world is going.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

A world without poverty is possible.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

A world without poverty is biblical.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

I believe that I can change the world.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

I believe that God has called me to change the world.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

As congregations/churches we have a special responsibility in the development of society.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

Our church is very much aware of the global impact we can make together.

STRONGLY DISAGREE |-----| **STRONGLY AGREE**

Look at your answers.

- ✓ Was your first impression accurate? How would you describe your attitude towards the world now?
- ✓ Would you have taken a different position a few years ago? If so, how and why?

Note: If you would like to do this icebreaker as part of a group, please access the group instructions in the download area.

bit.ly/WOP22downloads



WORLD IMAGES

When you look at the world, what do you see? Do you see things that excite you and fascinate you? Do you see the amazing and colourful details? The diversity and variety? The virtuoso masterpieces? The way everything seems to be connected? Or do you rather notice what is wrong? The flaws? The violence? The devastation? The threat of extinction? Is this Earth—with everything you find in it—a fellow creature to you? Or is it simply a backdrop, something you use for decoration or to make your life as pleasant as possible?

The way we look at something impacts the way we treat it. It determines whether we are willing to protect and preserve it; or whether we simply ignore it, or perhaps even discard it.

A very important moment in the history of our global view of the world was probably the flight of Apollo 8 in 1968. Apollo 8 was sent into space to take pictures of the moon in preparation for the first landing that would take place there. But it was a picture taken by accident what actually became really famous. A picture of planet Earth that the crew took once they had orbited the moon. This photo later became known as "Earthrise". It shows our blue planet surrounded by the sheer and endless blackness of space. Nothing new really, but it suddenly made many people vividly aware of the fact that we only have this one planet. To this day, it is probably the most influential environmental photograph ever taken.²

"The world
is no longer
paradise.
But it is still
the beloved
creation."

THE BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW AND MANDATE

According to the Bible, the Earth is God's creation. When I read through the Creation account (Gen. 1 and 2), I encounter a Creator who designs a wonderful planet with great attention to detail and who is Himself incredibly enthusiastic about how His work turns out. Genesis 1:31 (NLT) says that "He saw that it was very good". But this Creator does not only design a planet. He uses the dust of the ground (*adama* in Hebrew) to create a species that resembles Him: the "earthling" (mankind, *adam* in Hebrew) (Gen. 1:27; 2:7). This "earthling" gets to have a say in the final touches of the planet, for he is given the task of naming his fellow creatures (Gen. 2:19-20). And then, he is given a pretty straightforward job description, which makes it all the more impressive to me: Human beings are to be fruitful and multiply, and they are to take responsibility for the planet (Gen. 1:28; 2:15).



"Earthrise", taken on December 24, 1968, by Apollo 8 astronaut William Anders. Source: Wikipedia

*“This earth—
along with all
its creatures—was
created by God.”*



Eventually—and sadly—this idyllic picture turns into a distorted image when the two “earthlings” taste a forbidden fruit and thus upset the whole Earth’s ecosystem considerably. The benevolent creation is now the cradle of dissension and discord. Guilt, pain, discrimination, hardship and, finally, death take hold (see Gen. 3:7-24).

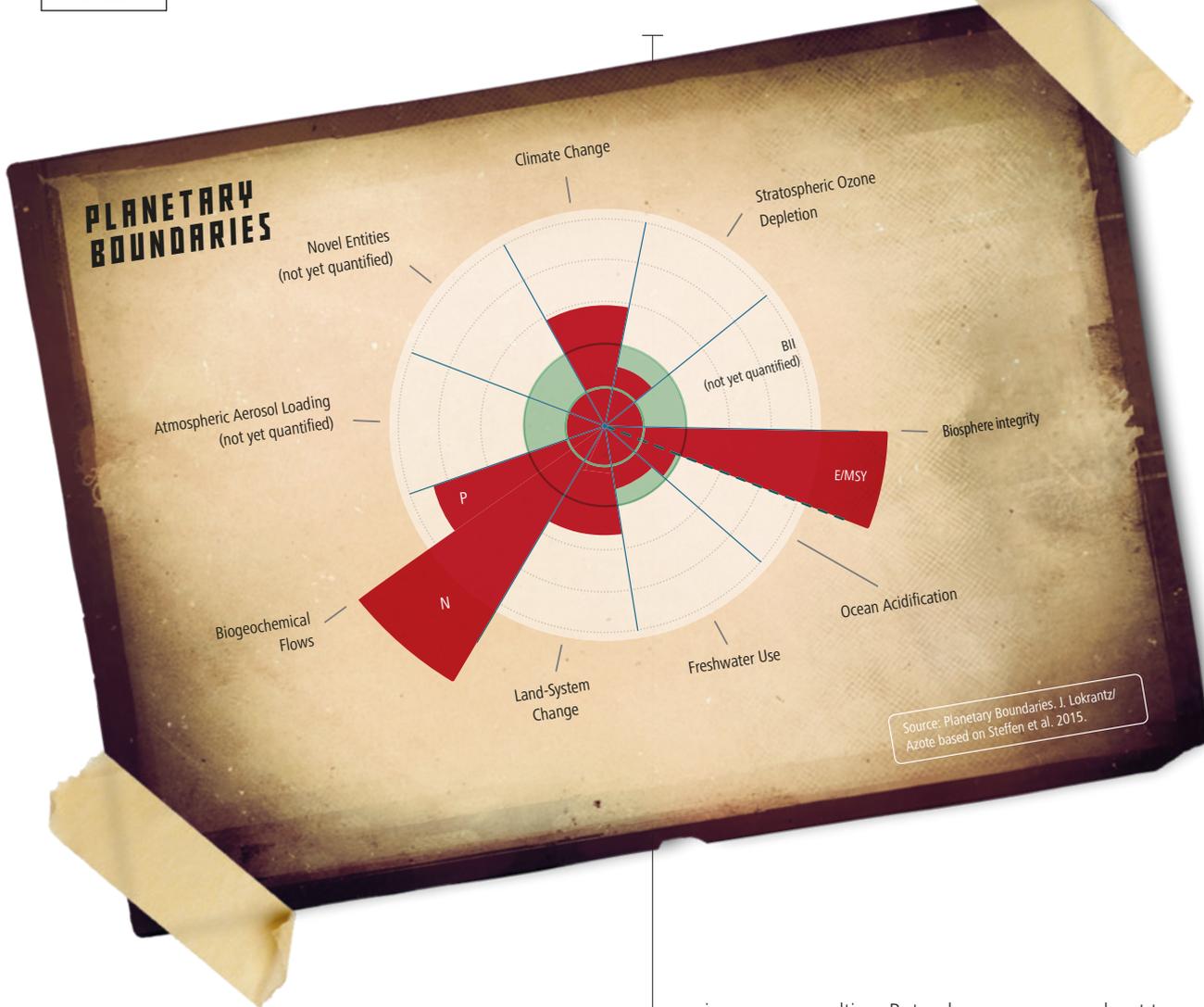
The world is no longer paradise. But it is still the beloved creation. For nowhere in the Bible do I read that creation has ceased to be creation. Or that humans have been released from their responsibility towards creation. No statement in the Bible indicates that God would somehow distance Himself from His creation. What I do read in the Bible, however, is that:

- ✓ God still claims that this world—and everything in it, including animals—belongs to Him (Deut. 10:14; Ps. 50:10-11; Ps. 24:1);
- ✓ We can still encounter God in a special way in creation (Ps. 19:1-4, Rom. 1:20);

- ✓ Jesus Himself liked to use images from nature for His parables (e.g. seeds, animals, plants, bread and wine – see Matt. 13:1-9; Luke 15:3-7; Mark 13:28-31; John 6:35; Mark 2:18-22);
- ✓ God still cares for His creation, which includes not only human beings, but also animals and the land (Lev. 25:2-7; Ps. 36:7; Ps. 65:10; Ps. 147:8-9), and He even renews it again and again (Ps. 104:30); and
- ✓ God is clearly not only invested in the redemption of human beings, but also of *all* creation (Rom. 8:20-21; Col. 1:15-20). Interestingly, this is a perspective that is consistent with the account of the Flood, where God makes His covenant not only with mankind, but explicitly and repeatedly with *all* living creatures on earth (Gen. 9:1-7).

As we will see, there are many reasons why we should work for the preservation and protection of this earth and of all our fellow creatures. One of these reasons is that it is a clear biblical mandate—a fact we simply cannot ignore.

This earth—along with all its creatures—was created by God. It belongs to Him, not us. And although He still cares for it and renews it, He has called us humans to take responsibility for it. A mission that was already given to us in the Garden of Eden and that we will probably still have on the New Earth.



HOW ARE WE DOING?

We humans are currently on the verge of irreparably damaging this planet. That is why some scientists talk about the so-called Anthropocene. They use this term to refer to the current era in which we live, where humans have become such a planetary force that they are significantly impacting the entire planet's climate and ecosystems.³ Our way of life, for example, has led to extremely high levels of methane and carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and oceans, and of nitrogen and phosphorus in the soil. The ice at the poles is melting, much faster than initially suspected. In less than 100 years, we have accumulated enough plastic waste to cover the entire planet. We have increased the extinction rate of plants and animals a hundredfold.⁴ There is simply no denying it: we humans are changing the Earth's ecosystems. Unfortunately, not for the better.

When we look at the news, we read a lot about climate change and its dramatic consequences. We learn about extreme weather conditions like heatwaves, heavy rain, hurricanes and devastating forest fires. We hear about the alarming rate at which the polar

ice caps are melting. But as humans, we are about to cross even more of our planet's boundaries.

In order to get the big picture, we can have a look at the model of planetary boundaries,⁵ which was first published in 2009 in a technical article entitled "Planetary Boundaries: Exploring the Safe Operating Space for Humanity".⁶ This document was written by around 30 international scientists (led by Johan Rockström) and was updated in 2015. This model establishes nine planetary boundaries, which we humans should not exceed if we want the Earth to continue to be a safe living space for us. The findings make it clear that we have already gone beyond our safe operating space in three areas and are close to the limit in others.

We are not only victims in this drama, but also perpetrators. Because it is also our lifestyle that is bringing our planet to the brink of destruction. Year after year, we are reminded of this on the so-called Earth Overshoot Day.⁷ This is the day on which we have used up all the resources that the Earth can produce in one year. In 2021, we reached this day on 29th July. In other words, as a global community, we are currently consuming the resources of 1.74 Earths. And the trend is on the rise. But we only have this one planet.

IN A NUTSHELL

Even though we perceive and feel the ruptures in creation, this Earth—along with all its creatures—is still God's creation, which He cares for and looks after, which continues to belong to Him alone and where we humans can still encounter Him. From the beginning, God has called us to be responsible gardeners and stewards of His creation. A mandate that is still valid to this day.

Science and the news make it very clear that we are not only stretching this creation beyond its limits; we are also in the process of irreversibly damaging it.

So, it is high time that we take care of God's creation. Out of reverence and respect for our fellow creatures. Out of concern and care for future generations. Out of loyalty and allegiance to God, our Creator.

"It is high time that we take care of God's creation. Out of reverence and respect for our fellow creatures..."

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, this world belongs to You. It is Your wonderful creation, which You continue to care for. Help me to be a good gardener and steward for You.

Country Overshoot Days 2021

Country Overshoot Days are also calculated annually. All European countries reach their Overshoot Day significantly early in the year. In 2021, for example, the United Kingdom reached its Overshoot Day on 19th May. You can find the date for other countries at www.overshootday.org/newsroom/country-overshoot-days/.



QUESTIONS

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." (Genesis 2:15 NIV)

1. **Do you recall a time when you experienced God in nature? Share your experience.**
2. **What people or experiences have shaped the way you relate to the world the most?**
3. **Since Creation, we humans have been called to cultivate and take care of this world. How is this divine mission reflected in the way you live?**
4. **What motivates you to actively work for the preservation of this Earth? What prevents you from doing so?**

A large area of dotted lines for writing answers to the questions.



CHALLENGE

CHALLENGE 1: CALCULATE YOUR ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT

Do you know what your impact is on the environment? To find out, all you need to do is calculate your personal ecological footprint. It will tell you how many Earths we would need if every person on this planet lived, travelled, ate and consumed like you.

The Global Footprint Network (www.footprintnetwork.org) offers you the possibility of calculating your own ecological footprint here: www.footprintcalculator.org

Date I completed this challenge:

CHALLENGE 2: TURNING THE RIGHT SCREWS

The central tenets of a more sustainable lifestyle are *efficiency*, *consistency* and *sufficiency*.

Efficiency means producing or consuming *better*. In other words, to consume the same things, but with less resource consumption and less CO₂ production.

Consistency means producing or consuming *differently*, for example, by relying on renewable energies or reusable materials.

Sufficiency means producing or consuming *less*. This could be accomplished by sharing, exchanging, giving away or doing without certain things.

Find something in your everyday life that you can do better or buy differently in terms of sustainability, in order to align yourself with the three tenets explained above (efficiency, consistency and sufficiency).

Date I completed this challenge:



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

JESUS—THE SOURCE, THE GOAL, THE SUSTAINER AND THE REDEEMER OF ALL CREATION

“Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created *everything* in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made *the things we can see* and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. *Everything* was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all *creation* together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled *everything* to himself. He made peace with *everything* in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross” (Col. 1:15-20 NLT, emphasis added).

Does this passage change or impact your attitude towards the planet and your fellow creatures? If so, how?



Key Text

JEREMIAH 22:13-16; MICAH 6:8

ICEBREAKER

A SENSE OF JUSTICE. Justice is a big and broad term. Each one of us will approach it differently depending on our personal history and our diverse life experiences.

Could **you** put into words—or even pictures—what **you** understand by justice?

**Note:**

A good way to approach this question is to think of situations in your life in which you experienced injustice yourself, situations in which you felt justice was simply missing. What is truly valuable to us often becomes particularly clear when it is violated or taken away somehow. In the words of the German comedian, Sebastian Pufpaff, "That's the way it is with injustice. Often you don't feel it until it happens to you."¹

This exercise is even more informative when you share it with others. Together, you can analyse situations better and realise how differently we people think about justice.

Note: If you would like to have an intense group experience on this topic, a different group icebreaker is available for you in the download area. bit.ly/WOP22downloads



“Because thanks
to sola gratia.
I know God
accepts me as
I am.”

SOLA GRATIA

He had made up his mind. He would study Law. But then a life-and-death experience prompted him to enter a monastery. And that is how he began his studies in theology. Years later, he even completed his doctorate.

However, his faith was challenged over and over again by the same questions: How can I possibly stand before God? How do I receive forgiveness? How can God be merciful towards *me*?

After much Bible study, he finally saw the light when he read the following text in the Epistle to the Romans: “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith’” (Rom. 1:16-17).

For Martin Luther, these verses opened up a whole new world.² All these years, he had been taught that man could only stand before God through good works, through the intercession of the saints and through certain ecclesiastical rituals. But now the scales had finally fallen from his eyes and he could see clearly: **we humans cannot earn our salvation; it can only be given**



to us by God. And that by grace alone—*sola gratia*. To accept this and internalise it requires real trust in God, in other words, faith. That is why the just will *live by faith*.

This realisation describes the heart of the Reformation. It was a great moment in church history. And it would be such a blessing today if we truly lived by it.³

Because thanks to *sola gratia*, I know God accepts me as I am. I can honestly and fearlessly face my failures because I have nothing to hide. *Sola gratia* prevents me from putting too much pressure on myself. And it protects me from the delusion of trying to score points with God by doing good deeds. *Sola gratia* reminds me that all I need to do is trust in *God*.

JUSTICE

It is also important to understand that the Bible is not only about answering the question of how I will get to “heaven”. (By the way, this question alone reveals a degree of individualism that must have been completely foreign to the writers of the Bible.) The Bible also spends a significant amount of time addressing another interesting question: how do we create a piece of heaven on earth?

When you browse through the *Poverty and Justice Bible*⁴, it soon becomes clear that this second question is also central to the Bible. In it, you find more than 2,000 highlighted verses that deal with poverty and justice.

The two main terms that describe the concept of justice in the Old Testament are the Hebrew words *mishpat* (justice) and its kindred word *tsedaqah* (righteousness).

MISHPAT

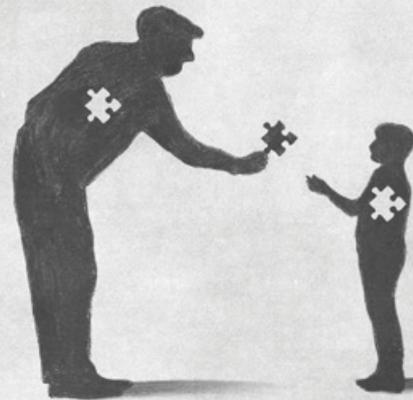
The word *mishpat* occurs—in its various forms—over 200 times in the Old Testament. It describes *rectifying justice*, that is, the commitment to act in favour of the victims of injustice and violence.

God Himself cares for *mishpat*: “He administers justice [*mishpat*] for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing” (Deut. 10:18; see also Ps. 146:7-9).

And God requires His followers to work for *mishpat*: “Administer true justice [*mishpat*]; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other” (Zech. 7:9-10 NIV; see also Jer. 22:3). The prophet Micah beautifully sums up God’s expectations as follows, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice [*mishpat*], and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8 ESV)

So God Himself intercedes for the powerless and the poor.⁵ And He is so committed that He is even called the “father of the fatherless” and the “defender of widows” (Ps. 68:4-5). But *mishpat* is not only God’s business, He also demands it from His followers. Especially for the sake of those who have the least economic and social power.

“He has told you,
O man, what is
good; and what does
the Lord require of
you but to do justice
[*mishpat*], and to
love kindness, and
to walk humbly
with your God?”



TSEDAQAH

The other Hebrew word, *tsedaqah*, is usually translated as “righteousness” or “being righteous”. It refers to what some call *primary justice*, that is, “behavior that, if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice [*mishpat*] unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else”.⁶ Like *mishpat*, *tsedaqah* is often about solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.⁷ In this sense, it is often translated as mercy or compassion⁸ in the Bible.

Tsedaqah is thus the divine ideal that should guide both individuals and entire nations.⁹ Proverbs 14:34 reminds us that “righteousness [*tsedaqah*] exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

The message of the prophet Jeremiah to King Jehoiakim rings so true nowadays. It is truly impressive:

¹³ And the Lord says, “What sorrow awaits Jehoiakim,
 who builds his palace with forced labor.
 He builds injustice into its walls,
 for he makes his neighbors work for nothing.
 He does not pay them for their labor.
¹⁴ He says, ‘I will build a magnificent palace
 with huge rooms and many windows.
 I will panel it throughout with fragrant cedar
 and paint it a lovely red.’
¹⁵ But a beautiful cedar palace does not make a great king!
 Your father, Josiah, also had plenty to eat and drink.
 But he was just [*mishpat*] and right [*tsedaqah*] in all his dealings.
 That is why God blessed him.
¹⁶ He gave justice and help to the poor and needy,
 and everything went well for him.
 Isn’t that what it means to know me?”
 says the Lord.
 (Jer. 22:13-16 NLT)

PRACTISE JUSTICE

If we want to be guided by the biblical understanding of justice, it is very important that we consider everything we have talked about so far—*sola gratia* **and** the joint concepts of *mishpat* and *tsedaqah*.

Mishpat and *tsedaqah* remind me that justice is a matter close to God’s heart. He sees and hears the misery and the cry of the oppressed and the exploited. He stands up for the rights of the poor and the powerless. As His followers, we are called to do the same. Because *sola gratia* also tells us that we are all equal. We are all *equal recipients* of God’s grace, which means we are *all* of equal value to God, and, consequently, we should *all* be treated justly. So, our commitment to social justice is not an optional “extra” on our to-do list, but an essential expression of our relationship with God as His disciples and as recipients of His grace.

“So, our commitment to social justice is not an optional ‘extra’ on our to-do list, but an essential expression of our relationship with God as His disciples and as recipients of His grace.”



“Even if we are not among the super-rich, we have to admit that we are among the wealthiest people on this planet.”



A LOUDLY UNJUST WORLD

When we look at our world, we see many positives:¹⁰

- ✓ Average life expectancy has increased from age 48 to age 71 since 1950.
- ✓ Since 1990, the number of people living in extreme income poverty, i.e., living on less than 1.90 US dollars a day, has fallen by more than half.
- ✓ Child mortality has fallen by more than 50%.
- ✓ More than two billion people have gained access to safe drinking water and toilets for the first time.

However, our prosperity also has many downsides:

- ✓ Worldwide, one person in nine does not have enough to eat.
- ✓ About two billion people live on less than three US dollars a day.
- ✓ In 2015, the world’s richest one percent already had more wealth than the remaining 99 percent of humanity put together.
- ✓ About 40 percent of the world’s agricultural land is now seriously threatened by erosion.
- ✓ By 2025, two out of three people worldwide are likely to live in water-stressed regions.
- ✓ In industrialised nations, every other person (50%) has access to higher education. In countries with few opportunities for development, on the other hand, one person in six does not even reach the age of 20 and only one in 33 manages to complete higher education.¹¹

- ✓ The conclusion of the United Nations Development Report of 2019 is, “In every country many people have little prospect for a better future. Lacking hope, purpose or dignity, they watch from society’s sidelines as they see others pull ahead to ever greater prosperity. Worldwide many have escaped extreme poverty, but even more have neither the opportunities nor the resources to control their lives.”¹²

Even if we are not among the super-rich, we have to admit that we are among the wealthiest people on this planet. How else could we in the industrialised world afford to consume the resources of three Earths? In the past, God sent the prophet Jeremiah to King Jehoiakim with a clear message, “Do justice [*mishpat*] and righteousness [*tsedaqah*]” (Jer. 22:3 ESV). Don’t you think the ball is in our court today?

PRAYER OF THE DAY

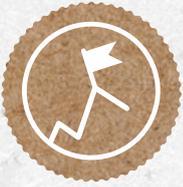
Dear God, You accept me just as I am out of love and mercy. I, too, want to treat my fellow creatures with the same love and mercy I receive from You. Please do not let me ignore the cry of the oppressed and the exploited. Show me where and how I can work for justice in this world.

QUESTIONS

"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8 NIV)

1. **Why do we often find it difficult to simply accept that we are saved by grace alone (*sola gratia*)? What does *sola gratia* mean to you personally?**
2. **In today's reading, Jeremiah 22:13-16 is quoted as a message that is still relevant to us nowadays. Do you see it that way too? What does the text remind you of?**
3. ***Mishpat* and *tsedaqah* are both close to God's heart, but they are also meant to be practised by His followers. How do you live *mishpat* and *tsedaqah* in your life? Is there anything that would help you to better integrate them in your life?**
4. **Why should you engage in *mishpat* and *tsedaqah* when you are saved by grace?**

A large grid of small dots for writing answers to the questions above.



CHALLENGE

EMPATHY FOR THE POOREST

A person lives in extreme poverty when they are unable to meet their basic needs. The World Bank defines the extreme poor as those living on less than 1.90 US dollars per day. This is roughly equivalent to 1.68 euros (as of November 2021). This amount is considered the minimum a person needs to barely survive.¹³

The United Nations estimates that, in 2020, between 720 and 811 million (that is an average of 768 million) of a total of 7.7 billion people went hungry worldwide. In other words, roughly one in ten people.¹⁴

These people often cannot afford medication. Education and housing are usually out of their reach as well.¹⁵

It is not at all possible for us to actually live on 1.90 US dollars (1.68 euros) per day. However, to get a sense of what poverty feels like, we challenge you to spend only 1.90 US dollars per day *on food* for one day, three days or maybe even a whole week.¹⁶

How did you feel after this challenge? Share your experience with a friend.

Tips:

- ✓ For a more enriching experience, it is of course ideal if you can take on this challenge together with others.
- ✓ Please make sure that your health does not suffer during this challenge!

Date I completed this challenge:



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

JESUS AND THE POOR

“In Proverbs [19:17; 14:31] we see God identifying with the poor symbolically. But in the incarnation and death of Jesus we see God identifying with the poor and marginal literally. Jesus was born in a feed trough. When his parents had him circumcised the offering they made—two pigeons [Luke 2:24; Lev. 12:8]—was that prescribed for the poorest class of people in the society. He lived among the poor and the marginalised, who were drawn to him even as the respectable were repulsed by him. We see the kind of life he led when he said, ‘Foxes have holes, birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head’ (Luke 9:59). At the end of his life he rode into Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey, spent his last evening in a borrowed room, and when he died he was laid in a borrowed tomb. They cast lots for his only possession, his robe, for there on the cross he was stripped of everything. He died naked and penniless. He had little the world valued and the little he had was taken. He was discarded—thrown away. But only because of him do we have any hope.”¹⁷

Jesus identifies with the poor. How does this impact your discipleship (i.e. the way you live out your life as a disciple of Jesus)?



Key Text

LUKE 10:25-37; ISAIAH 1:11-17

ICEBREAKER

(UN)JUST WORLD.¹ How are the planet's resources distributed? In which continent do most people live? Where are the people rather poor? Where are they rather rich? Where is the ecological footprint particularly large? Does your impression match the reality? Let's find out!

- Write down your estimates in the table below.
- Compare your estimates with the 2018 statistical report, which you can find in the download area by using the link below.
- Reflect on your observations:
 - Were there any large discrepancies between your estimates and the actual distribution? Do you have any idea why you might have been off by so much?
 - Do you find any imbalances between population, income distribution and environmental consumption? Do you see any connections or patterns?
 - If you divide the income and the environmental consumption by the corresponding population, you get the per capita value. How does that change or impact your perspective?

	World population		Income (gross national product)		Environmental consumption (ecological footprint)	
	in millions	in %	in billions of USD	in %	in billions of gha*	in %
 Europa & Russia						
North America						
Central & South America						
Asia						
Africa						
Oceania						
Total		100		100		100

* The global hectare (gha) is the standard measuring unit for the ecological footprint. It measures the extent to which human consumption impacts the biosphere. Find more information at: www.footprintnetwork.org.

TIP: If you do this activity in groups, you can make this exercise more interactive by providing each group with 30 same-coloured tiles (which add up to 100%) for each of the three categories. Each group should then agree on how to distribute the tiles among the continents.

Note: You have two more icebreakers waiting for you in the download area for an intense group experience on the topic. bit.ly/WOP22downloads



"For it is a virtually immutable law of this world that if we buy cheaply, **someone else is bearing the real cost.**"

WHAT A WONDERFUL WORLD

We live in a globalised world. We eat Indian, Chinese, Italian, and even Mexican food. We travel to distant countries. We chat with friends across the globe; sometimes so intensely that these online connections seem closer to us than the people on our own street! Again and again, we encounter images from faraway places in the news, and sometimes the conflicts or catastrophes that happen elsewhere also impact our everyday lives. National borders play a role only to a limited extent. Thanks to the internet, we have grown together as a global community. We have become global citizens, but above all global shoppers.



A TYPICAL DAY FOR A WOMAN TEA WORKER IN ASSAM

4am–4:30am	Wake up and clean the house and courtyard (some also need to collect water)
5am–6am	Prepare food for the day
6am–7am	Get ready and leave for work, walking 8–9km to reach the plot
8am–4pm	Work in the garden (if even one minute late she could lose an entire day's wages)
4pm–5pm	Weigh the plucked leaves (assuming manager arrives on time – if not, much later), sometimes collect firewood on way home
5pm–8pm	Home, freshen up and prepare dinner
8pm–9pm	Eat dinner
10pm	Go to bed

Source: Based on actual and average figures and times provided in: TISS. (2019). Decent Work for Tea Plantation Workers in Assam: Constraints, challenges and prospects. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/620876/bp-human-cost-assam-tea-101019-en.pdf>

Our supermarket is the world. We buy technology from Asia, cocoa beans from the Ivory Coast, coffee grains from South America, grapes from South Africa, apples and kiwis from New Zealand, toys from China, avocados from Peru, clothes from Bangladesh, beef from Brazil and roses from Africa. We have become accustomed to this extremely diverse range of products whilst probably being unaware of the many kilometres the products we buy actually travel. We're used to immediate delivery. We're used to surprisingly cheap. But, have you ever wondered how it is that we can buy a chocolate with cocoa from the Ivory Coast for less than one euro in the supermarket? Or a T-shirt made of Indian cotton and manufactured in Bangladesh for as little as three euros?

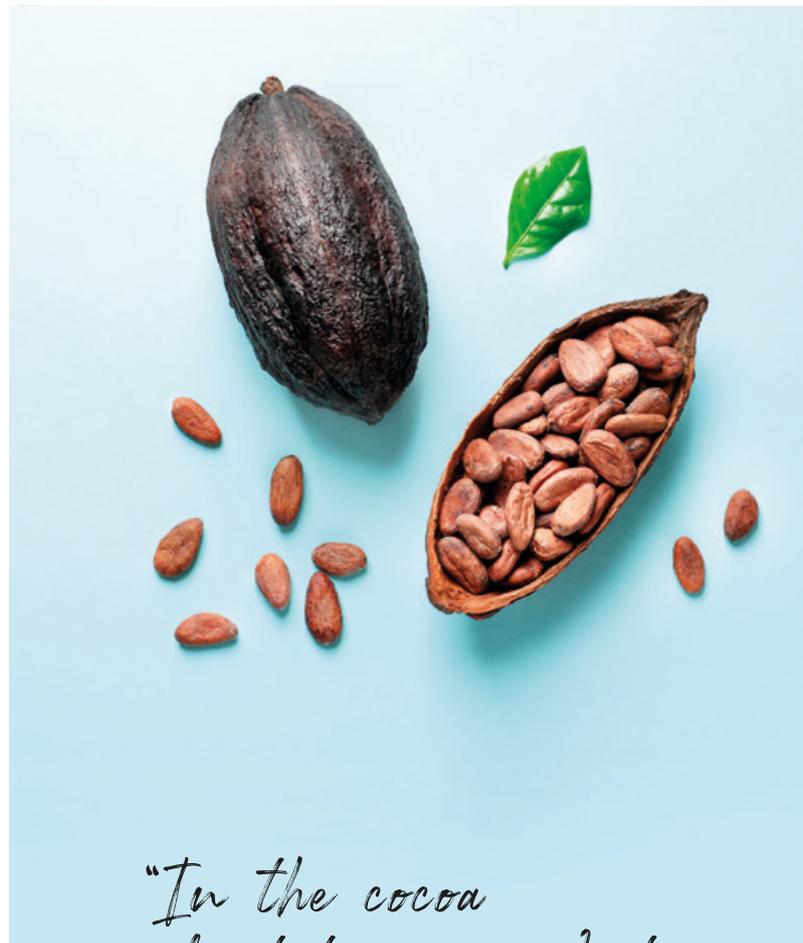
"Our supermarket is **the world.**"

THE DARK SIDE

Unfortunately, what feels like paradise to us also has a dark side. For it is a virtually immutable law of this world that if we buy cheaply, someone else is bearing the real cost.

Let's take a look at chocolate production, for example. In the cocoa plantations of West Africa, around two million children work under exploitative conditions. They have to do hard physical work with little or no protection from the toxic pesticides. And it is chocolate manufacturers like Ferrero, Nestlé, Mars and Mondelez who—despite their promise almost 20 years ago to reduce child labour on their plantations—apparently continue to condone that children be shamelessly exploited for their cocoa.²

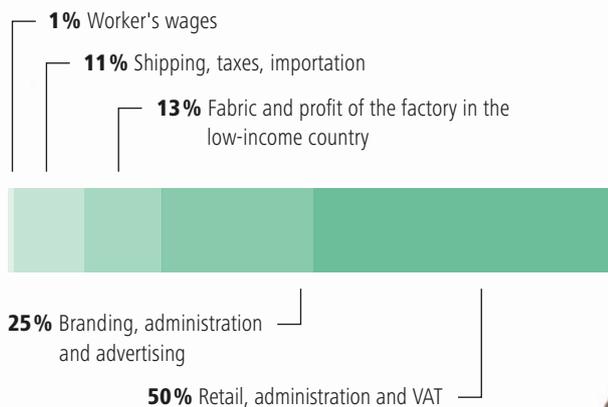
What about the cultivation of black tea? In the supermarket (at least in Germany), a packet of branded black tea with 50 tea bags costs about three euros. According to an Oxfam study, the workers usually earn only four cents of this, an amount that does not even cover their food. The rest is shared by the German manufacturer and the supermarket (2.60 euros), the middleman (20 cents) and the plantation owner (16 cents).³



"In the cocoa plantations of West Africa, around two million children work under exploitative conditions."

UNFAIR WAGES FOR A PAIR OF JEANS

The wage for a 100-euro pair of jeans is one euro. It is trading and advertising that make the jeans expensive.



Source: Greenpeace Magazin (Ed.). *Textil-Fibel 4*, 2011, p. 14

The situation is similar in the textile industry: cotton farmers are usually forced to sell their cotton to textile producers at extremely low prices. The textiles are then processed in countries such as Bangladesh or Pakistan, where people usually have to work long hours under miserable working and safety conditions and at exploitative wages. A worker earns less than one euro for a 100-euro pair of jeans.⁴

LOVING OUR NEIGHBOUR IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

While manufacturers and advertisers seek to persuade us that we need their products in order to be happy, Jesus invites us to follow a completely different strategy. When a teacher of the law asked Him for guidance, Jesus confirmed that the key to a successful life is actually found in the following Old Testament verses, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself’ (Deut. 6:5; Deut. 19:18)” (Luke 10:27 ESV). This answer left the teacher of the law unsatisfied, so he decided to ask a second question, “And who is my neighbour?” (v. 29). It looked like he was actually trying to say, “Surely you don’t mean I have to love and meet the needs of *everyone*.”⁵ The truth is this question—“Who is my neighbour?”—was relevant then and is still relevant to us now, in the globalised world we live in.

Jesus responds by telling a story, a parable. We know it as the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-35). On his way from Jerusalem to Jericho, a man is attacked, robbed, beaten up and left half dead. The first person to find him is a priest, but he simply passes him by. Then comes a Levite, one of the temple workers who assisted the priests, and he does the same thing: he turns a blind eye to the badly wounded man. Both of these people would have been expected to stop and help. In the end, it is a *Samaritan* who is the hero of the story because he is the one who is moved with compassion. He stops to help the man, and then transports him to safety. He even pays for the victim to be nursed back to health. Jesus ends His parable with a surprising question, “Which of these three, do you think, *proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?*” (v. 36 ESV, emphasis added). Mind-blowing! Because here Jesus no longer asks who saw his neighbour in the victim, but who *proved to be* the victim’s neighbour.

“Surely you don’t mean I have to love and meet the needs of **everyone**.”



This surprising short story has enriched my personal understanding of what it means to truly love others. Here is what I have learnt:

1. *Religiosity without love for others is a farce.* On a first reading, one might miss the cultural and religious implications that Jesus obviously and deliberately worked into this story. On the one hand, the Samaritans were despised and shunned by the pious Jews, who saw them as religious heretics. On the other hand, of all people, it is the priest and the Levite, presumably after serving in the temple,⁶ who do not show mercy. With His story, Jesus is clearly questioning a religious system that knows all about rituals and church services, but does nothing to encourage real acts of kindness and mercy (see Isa. 1:11-17).
2. *Displaying neighbour-love can also cost something.* Jesus makes it clear that the Samaritan has to pay for his neighbour. He gives two days’ worth of wages and is even willing to cover any additional expenses (Matt. 20:1-16). This point is crucial to me because we consumers often excuse our cheap shopping by saying that we cannot afford to do otherwise.
3. *Loving others cannot be limited.* I understand the question of the teacher of the law only too well. With all the needs of this planet, it would be so convenient if I could somehow

*“Jesus is clear,
uncompromising and
all the more
challenging: we owe
our neighbour-love
to all the people
who need it.”*

limit my kindness and generosity; if I could simply owe my neighbour-love only to my family, my brothers and sisters in the church, or my fellow countrymen. But at this point Jesus is clear, uncompromising and all the more challenging: we owe our neighbour-love to all the people who need it. In a globalised world, this includes the children who work in the cocoa plantations of West Africa, the tea worker in Assam, the cotton picker in India and the seamstress in Bangladesh.

When we consider the story of the Good Samaritan, buying cheap takes on a new perspective. When Jesus calls us to be a neighbour to all he is also calling us to take responsibility as buyers and consumers.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, I admit I am among the more privileged people in this globalised world we live in. Please help me to be aware of how fortunate I am. Help me to use my education, my finances, my freedom and my influence to bring justice to the exploited.

PRACTICAL STEPS



Independent certificates

The first and easiest step towards being more responsible consumers is to look for independent certificates when shopping. It is important to distinguish these from proprietary labels. Here are a few examples of widely used and trustworthy independent certificates: GOTS (global-standard.org), Fair Wear Foundation (fairwear.org) and Fairtrade (fairtrade.net). You can find more information about each of them in the download area.



Sustainable producers

As good as independent certificates are, they have their limitations because checks on the agreed standards cannot be carried out as frequently as would be desirable. It is therefore advisable not to rely solely on independent certification, but to buy straight from manufacturers whose entire corporate philosophy is based on fair trade and sustainable production. For example, for clothing, you could have a look at Stanley/Stella (www.stanleystella.com) or Neutral (www.neutral.com).⁷ For chocolate, coffee and tea, you could try GEPA (<https://www.gepa.de/en/welcome.html>).



Supply Chain Laws

For justice to be served to all those who experience exploitation and oppression, we need to do more than just buy fair trade products. A legal framework is needed to protect human rights as well as the environment. We need supply chain laws to require companies to carefully monitor their entire supply chain—from the cultivation of the cotton plant to the shipping of the T-shirt—to make sure they comply with human rights and environmental standards, and to allow government inspections. Such laws must also enable those affected abroad by human rights violations to sue irresponsible companies for damages in court, for example, in Germany. In June 2021, the German parliament passed a supply chain law that, although imperfect, gives us hope that change is possible.⁸ Hopefully, the future EU supply chain law will be a more effective tool against violations of human rights and environmental standards.

Advocating for such strong and effective laws—by supporting and promoting national or even European initiatives—might be one of the most effective, far-reaching forms of neighbour-love we can offer to the exploited and oppressed nowadays.

Access the download area here:

bit.ly/WOP22downloads



QUESTIONS

"So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?" And he said, 'He who showed mercy on him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do likewise.'"

(Luke 10:36-37)

- 1. If you went shopping with God, would you shop differently? How so?**
- 2. Who do you most identify with in the story of the Good Samaritan? Why? Who are the people who "fell among the robbers" for you today?**
- 3. Look around or think of your room. What things do you own that make you really happy?**
- 4. Martin Luther is reported to have said, "Three conversions are necessary: the conversion of the heart, the conversion of the mind and the conversion of the wallet." Do you agree? Justify your position.**

A large rectangular area of dotted lines for writing answers to the questions above.



Key Text

MATTHEW 24 AND 25

ICEBREAKER

DREAMERS AND REALISTS. "I have a dream." These were the words with which civil rights activist Martin Luther King began his world-famous speech in 1963. In 1980, former chancellor Helmut Schmidt stated, "People who have visions should go see a doctor."¹ With whom do you agree?

We humans depict the world in very different ways. Our views are particularly influenced by the way we think, that is, our patterns of thought. Therefore, in addition to a theological reflection—which we will get to in a moment—it is also crucial that we become aware of our own ways of thinking so that we can honestly engage with the world and its future. The following questions should help you gain some insight:²

- Do you look at things from a rational or an emotional point of view?
RATIONAL ————— **EMOTIONAL**
- Do you prefer stability or change?
STABILITY ————— **CHANGE**
- How comfortable are you with taking risks?
RISK ————— **SAFETY**
- Is the glass half-empty or half-full for you?
HALF-EMPTY ————— **HALF-FULL**
- What do you notice or focus on more: similarities or differences?
SIMILARITIES ————— **DIFFERENCES**
- Do you see problems or solutions?
PROBLEMS ————— **SOLUTIONS**
- Do you like to delegate responsibility or take it on?
DELEGATE RESPONSIBILITY ————— **TAKE ON RESPONSIBILITY**
- Are your actions based on the short-term or the long-term?
SHORT-TERM ————— **LONG-TERM**

Note: This exercise is even more exciting when you contrast your answers with others. Does your personal perspective match that of others? What similarities and differences did you discover?

Note: You can find more icebreaker ideas in the download area: bit.ly/WOP22downloads



ARE WE FATALISTS?

Perhaps what prevents us from working towards a more sustainable world more than anything else is our perception of the future of the Earth. Traditionally, Adventists do not expect it to be good. Instead, we expect it to bring an increasing deterioration of reality. Let me be more specific: we expect more catastrophes, more war, more unkindness, more abuse of power, more persecution of believers. We also think we can justify this perspective of the future using the Bible, for example, by referring to Jesus' end-time speech (Matt. 24:1-44), where He speaks about the so-called signs of the times.

Personally, I believe that this reading of the text is one-sided and even harmful, because it might keep some of us from being the kind of blessing to this world that we are actually called to be.



“Traditionally, Adventists do not expect [the future] to be good. Instead, we expect it to bring an increasing deterioration of reality.”

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES

There is no denying that, in His end-time speech in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus describes the future course of human history as one with many negative features: deception (v. 5), wars (vv. 6-7), famines (v. 7), earthquakes (v. 7), persecution of believers (v. 9), false prophets (v. 11), false christs (v. 5), lawlessness and unkindness (v. 12). If we look at the last 2,000 years of human history, this summary seems quite accurate.

But we must not disregard Jesus' *attitude* towards these realities:

- ✓ “See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet” (v. 6 ESV).
- ✓ “All these are but the beginning of the birth pains” (v. 8 ESV).
- ✓ “But he who endures to the end shall be saved” (v. 13).

To me, this doesn't sound like fatalism or doomsday desolation. To me, it sounds more like, “Don't lose faith and don't let world history intimidate you!” Because in the end the Kingdom of God will prevail: cosmically (vv. 29-31) and unexpectedly, as in the days of Noah (vv. 37-42) and similar to a thief (vv. 43-44).

KEEP WATCH AND BE READY

Even more important than the so-called signs of the times is, of course, the question: “How should we live in the interim, that is, from now until the Second Coming?” In Matthew’s wording, how can we watch (*grēgoreō* in Greek) and be ready (*hetoimos* in Greek)?

It seems Matthew was also concerned with this question. Because the passage about the signs of the times is followed by four parables in which the same basic scenario is sketched over and over again: people are waiting for someone—be it the master of the household (Matt. 24:45-51), the bridegroom (Matt. 25:1-13), the wealthy owner (Matt. 25:14-30) or the Son of Man Himself (Matt. 25:31-46). It is evident that Matthew wants these four parables to respond to the question of how to be watchful and ready.

In the first parable, a faithful servant is compared to a wicked servant. The faithful one faithfully provides food for the other household servants. The evil one, on the other hand, beats his fellow servants and is basically a party animal. When the master of the household returns, he puts the faithful servant in charge of all his goods, while he sends the evil servant to wherever there is “weeping and gnashing of teeth”.

In the second parable, ten virgins go out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them are wise and so they take extra oil for their lamps, while the other five are foolish and simply take their lamps. They all fall asleep because the bridegroom is delayed. When his arrival is

“Even more important than the so-called signs of the times is, of course, the question: ‘How should we live in the interim, that is, from now until the Second Coming?’”



finally announced, all the lamps have gone out. But while the wise virgins can simply refill theirs, the foolish ones have to go out to buy lamp oil, which is why they unfortunately miss the bridegroom.

In the third parable, a wealthy man distributes his wealth among his three servants before he leaves the country. One receives five talents, another, two, and the other, one, “each according to his own ability”, the Bible says. While the first two servants invest their entrusted talents and double their fortune, the third servant buries his talent in the ground. When the master returns, he settles accounts with his servants. He is satisfied with the two servants who invested his fortune and increased it, but the servant who refused to do anything with it is thrown out into the darkness.

Finally, in the fourth parable, the Son of Man returns. He sits down on the throne of glory and gathers all the nations before Him, dividing them into two groups. One group he blesses and makes heir of the Kingdom because they—apparently unawares (otherwise they would not be so surprised)—have taken care of the basic human needs of the “least of these”, those with whom the Son of Man identifies the most. The other group, on the other hand, He vigorously rejects. They also call the Son of Man “Lord”, but they have not taken care of the basic needs of the “least of these”.

So, if we want to find out how a person who is watchful and ready differs from one who is not, we have to work out the differences between the wise and the foolish, the blessed and the cursed, in these four parables. I have summarised my conclusions in the table on the next page.

PARABLE OVERVIEW

Parable	Trait of the Wise/Blessed	Trait of the Foolish/Cursed	Questions for you
Parable 1 (Matt. 24:45-51)	Use their power responsibly.	Abuse their power.	How do you deal with the power (possessions, money, relationships, education) you have been given?
Parable 2 (Matt. 25:1-13)	Are prepared for things to take longer.	Act very short-sightedly.	How does your life perspective and engagement change when you consider the fact that it might take longer for Jesus to return?
Parable 3 (Matt. 25:14-30)	Engage with what they can and what they have.	Hold back what they can and what they have.	What are you doing with what God has put in your hands?
Parable 4 (Matt. 25:31-46)	Take care of the needs of the least of these (without expecting anything in return).	Not interested in the needs of the least of these.	Do you have an eye for the "least of these"? Who are they today? How do you support them?

"So they do not focus their attention on the end of the world or the world to come, but on how they can shape and change the earthly present and future in the best possible way."

FATALISTS OR DOERS OF GOOD?

In a nutshell, Matthew describes the followers of Jesus who are waiting for His Second Coming as people who are not distracted by the events of world history, but are rather ready to commit themselves to this world and to their fellow human beings—especially the poor—with who they are, what they have and what they can do. So they do not focus their attention on the end of the world or the world to come, but on how they can shape and change the earthly present and future in the best possible way.

Incidentally, this also coincides with the fact that the central message of Jesus is not the New Earth, but the Kingdom of God.³ A Kingdom that will be fully established when Jesus returns, but that is already in our midst (Luke 17:20-21), by which values we can already live (Matt. 5:1-12) and for which we even ask every time we pray the Lord's Prayer: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10, emphasis added).

AGENDA 2030

If we—as followers of Jesus—are called to work for a better earthly present and future, then it is terrific that we are not alone in this endeavour. In September 2015, the United Nations unanimously decided to make the world a better place and agreed on

"We envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive."

17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with 169 sub-goals to be achieved by 2030.

"We envisage a world free of poverty, hunger, disease and want, where all life can thrive," reads the vision of this ambitious historic document, which was signed by all 193 Heads of State and Government and High Representatives, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.⁴ Never before has humanity set such lofty goals for its future.

However, as with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) or the Paris Agreement (2015), we can expect implementation to be tricky. And yet we Christians should evaluate this as a positive development. We should appreciate it and support it to the best of our ability. After all, these sustainability goals are basically an encouragement for those of us who want to be watchful and ready for the return of Jesus!

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, thank You because one day You will come again to heal what is broken and to restore justice. Until then, help me to love my fellow human beings with what I am, what I have and what I can do. Help me to shape this world in a positive way.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

	No Poverty		Reduced Inequalities
	Zero Hunger		Sustainable CI and Communities
	Good Health and Well-being		Responsible Consumption and Production
	Quality Education		Climate Action
	Gender Equality		Life below Water
	Clean Water and Sanitation		Life on Land
	Affordable and Clean Energy		Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
	Decent Work and Economic Growth		Partnership for the Goals
	Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure		

Source: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

Find more information on each goal here:

bit.ly/WOP22downloads



QUESTIONS

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'" (Matthew 25:40 NIV)

1. **The four parables following Jesus' end-time speech represent a challenge for us (see table on p. 38). What have you become more aware of today?**
2. **Matthew 24 begins with the disciples asking for a sign of the Second Coming and the end of the world (Matt. 24:3), but Jesus actually compares His Second Coming to that of a thief (Matt. 24:43-44). Do you have any idea why Jesus would not want us to know the exact time of His Second Coming? Would you like to know the time? Why?**
3. **Do your ideas of being watchful and ready coincide with the qualities of the wise and blessed in the four parables? How so? What has strengthened your conviction? What surprised you?**
4. **Do you think that, as followers of Jesus, we should support visions such as the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations? Give reasons for your answer.**

.....

CHURCH



Key Text

MATTHEW 5:13-16

ICEBREAKER

WHAT DOES CHURCH MEAN TO YOU? Is church synonymous with worship? Or is there more to it? Does the church need a building? Or would it be possible to be a church without a building? What is the purpose of the church? Do we really live church the way we envision it?

This icebreaker is not about finding beautiful formulas or theological truths. The goal is to figure out what is important to you personally about church.

If you are doing this icebreaker on your own, print out the sheet with 140 values* and work through them as follows:

1. Choose and mark the ten values that are most important to you when you think about church.
2. Narrow down your ten most important values to three. Which three values are absolutely indispensable for you in relation to church?
3. If possible, put your three essential values in descending order, starting with the most important.

If you are doing this icebreaker in a group, you can follow a more intuitive method:¹

1. Everyone—except the moderator—should stand in a circle facing outwards. Give each person a pen and 10 small sticky notes. (Have extra sticky notes available in case they are needed.)
2. The moderator will read each value out loud for everyone to hear, giving a short time for reflection before moving on to the next value.
3. Each participant must decide if the value that has been read is important to them in relation to church. If it is, they should write it down on their sticky note. Each participant may have a maximum of three values in their hand. If they already have three, they must remove a value before adding a new one.

Questions for reflection:

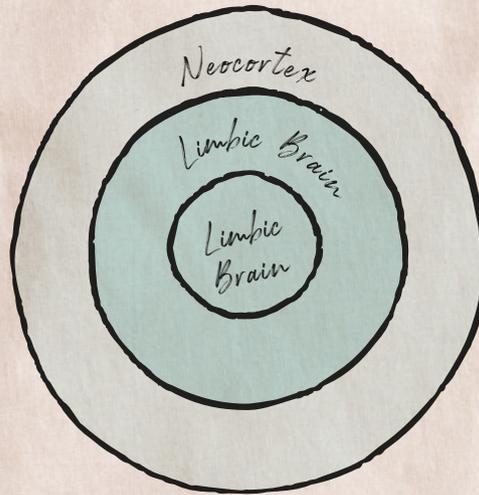
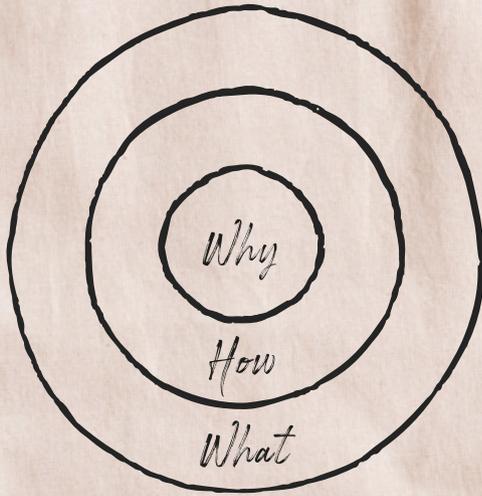
1. Why are the values you chose so important to you in relation to church?
2. Are these values that you just wish for? Or do you actually experience and live out these values at church?
How do you know whether these values are applied or not in the church?
3. How do you personally implement these values in your life?
4. Does anyone else share the same values as you in relation to church?

**You can find the list of 140 values
in the download area.*

bit.ly/WOP22downloads



THE GOLDEN CIRCLE AND THE HUMAN BRAIN



Source: Simon Sinek. The Golden Circle.
Available at: <https://simonsinek.com/product/share-the-golden-circle-presenter-slides-and-notes/>

"People don't buy what you do: people buy why you do it."

THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

One of the most impressive TED Talks I have seen in recent years is that of the British-American business consultant Simon Sinek on the so-called Golden Circle. For him, the Golden Circle answers the question of why some people or organisations inspire and build a loyal customer base, while others fail to do so even though they offer similar ideas and perhaps even cheaper products. His thesis is that the people or organisations that inspire us *always start with why*.

The Golden Circle represents the three levels in which we can communicate when we talk and think about what we do, whether privately or in our organisation:

"I think Simon Sinek points us to an essential truth. We need to define our why, whether we are a church or a youth group."



1. The outer circle: *What* do we offer? (E.g. a product or an event.)
2. The middle circle: *How* does our offer differ from what others offer?
3. The inner circle: *Why* do we do what we do?

Sinek observed that the organisations and people that inspire and sustainably engage people can, above all, clearly formulate why they do what they do. They think, act and communicate according to the Golden Circle, from the inside out. According to Sinek, we get excited about a cause when we identify with its why. In his words, "People don't buy what you do; people buy why you do it."²

Simon Sinek did not develop this model primarily for churches, of course. But don't you think we—the church, the local congregation or the youth group—would also benefit from asking ourselves every now and then why we exist and why we do what we do? Right now, would you be able to explain why and for what purpose your church or youth group exists? And if so, would others formulate it in exactly the same way as you?

I think Simon Sinek points us to an essential truth. We need to define our why, whether we are a church or a youth group. Only then will we be able to tell whether what drives us—our *why*—is aligned with *how* we live. Only then will we be authentically and

enthusiastically Christian (or a church).³ Only then will we be able to answer the question of whether and to what extent sustainability should play a central role in our church life.

CHURCH IMAGES

Something that points us quickly and directly to our why are images. Images appeal to us not only rationally, but also emotionally and intuitively—a range that we absolutely need if we want to discover our real why.⁴

According to Adventist theologian Richard Rice, there are three images that have marked our church identity so far: the church as an *army*, the church as a *business* and the church as a *family*.

Surprising as it may be, the image of the *church as an army* is deeply rooted in the history of Israel and the church. The conquest of Canaan is one of the great stories in the Old Testament. The most colourful figure in Israel's history is probably David, the warrior king. The apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation are filled with many warlike scenes. In Revelation 19:11-21, for example, Jesus Himself leads the heavenly hosts, whilst riding a white horse. And then there is the well-known passage on spiritual armour (Eph. 6:11, 13-17). No wonder it was easy for

churches in the Middle Ages to inspire many Christians to join the unspeakable crusades. But we as Adventists also have this image deeply embedded in our DNA. Or don't we also talk about the great conflict between light and darkness?⁵

The *church as a business* will probably surprise you even more. We also find this image in the Bible. For example, Isaiah 5:1-7 describes the people of Israel as God's vineyard. This vineyard is lovingly planted by the vinedresser, but it bears no fruit, and so it is destroyed. Almost half of Jesus' parables talk about farmers, traders or stewards who are accountable to God (e.g. see the Parable of the Talents in Matt. 25:14-30). I am therefore not surprised that performance and productivity also play a prominent role in the Adventist church. Numbers are often very important to us (e.g. number of baptisms, tithing income, church attendance, number of Bible studies) because we think this is the way to measure our growth and success. The current initiative of our world

church called *total member involvement* (www.tmi.adventist.org) is basically based on this self-understanding that we are accountable to God.⁶

Finally, we have the image of the *church as a family*, which is probably the one we identify with the most. On the one hand, the Bible speaks of God as Father and Mother (Ps. 103:13; Isa. 66:13) and, on the other hand, of the church as a family (Luke 8:19-21; Mark 10:28-30; Eph. 2:18-19). Jesus Himself taught us to pray the Lord's Prayer, which starts by calling God our Father (Matt. 6:9). Paul writes about how we have been adopted into God's family and how the Holy Spirit assures us that we are the children of God (Gal. 4:6-7; Rom. 8:15, 23; 9:4; Eph. 1:5). Thus, the logical consequence of being God's children is that we are brothers and sisters to one another. This is a concept that is even present in our language, when we address each other as *brothers and sisters in Christ*.⁷

"Something that points us quickly and directly to our why are images. Images appeal to us not only rationally, but also emotionally and intuitively."

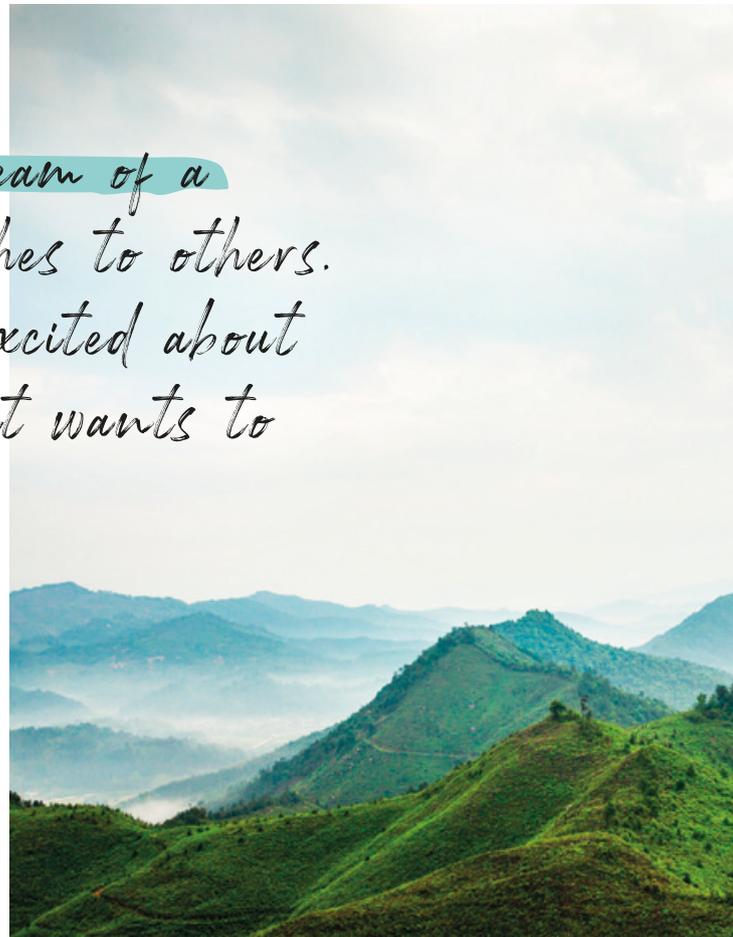


"This why excites me. I dream of a church that not only preaches to others, but that—like Jesus—is so excited about the Kingdom of God that it wants to learn to live by it."

Each of these images is found in the Bible. Each of these images emphasises an important aspect of our Adventist understanding of church. We should not ignore any of them. But in order to formulate a clear *why*, we have to decide on a guiding and central metaphor that defines us as a church and what we are here to do. Is it to fight for God? To perform for God? Or to be a family?

While I (like Richard Rice) clearly favour the image of the family, I would like to modify it a little, because the church must not only be an end in itself, it must rather be *a family with a purpose; in this case, a family with a social responsibility*. For this reason, I would like to add an additional concept to the mix, represented by three images that share the same underlying meaning: the *church as salt, light and a letter* to the world.

As mentioned elsewhere, Jesus' central message was the Kingdom of God (Matt. 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:16-21; Acts 1:3, 6; 28:23, 31). It is mentioned 162 times in the New Testament alone.⁹ Jesus Himself embodies the Kingdom of God (e.g. Matt. 11:1-6), but He also uses every opportunity He has to make people aware of the *nature* of the Kingdom of God (e.g. in the Sermon on the Mount, and also in His parables). He even teaches us to pray for it, "Your kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10). So, if Jesus made the kingdom of God His *why*, wouldn't it make sense that His followers do the same? That we too would proclaim that the Kingdom of God is near? That we would be guided by its values and, whenever and wherever possible, we would make the Kingdom of God tangible,



even if only in fragments? All this in order to be *salt* (Matt. 5:13), *light* (Matt. 5:14-16) and a *letter* (2 Cor. 3:2-3) to this world?

This *why* excites me. I dream of a church that not only preaches to others, but that—like Jesus—is so excited about the Kingdom of God that it wants to learn to live by it, even if it means going against the social mainstream.

Don't you think that for a church with this as its *why*, caring for creation, social justice, neighbour-love and responsibility to future generations would be of utmost importance?

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, church was Your idea. For the good of this world. Please help us to align our why with Your why, so that people can experience Your Kingdom in our midst, despite our imperfections.

QUESTIONS

"You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavour, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men." (Matthew 5:13)

1. **Do you know the why of your local church? What is it?**
2. **Today's chapter addresses different church images. In your church, do you observe behaviours or rituals that fit in with any of the church images shared? Explain your answer.**
3. **What is your personal why for church? How do you live this why in your church?**
4. **Does caring for creation, social justice, neighbour-love and responsibility to future generations align with your why for church? Give reasons for your answer.**

A large grid of small dots on a light brown background, intended for writing answers to the questions above.



CHALLENGE

THE COMMUNITY CHALLENGE

A very concrete and simple way to show that caring for creation, social justice, neighbour-love and responsibility to future generations are important to you as a church is to agree on specific sustainable practices. But, of course, this requires someone to take the first step/s. Today, we want to challenge **you** to be a leader and initiator of this kind of change in your local church.

Choose a sustainable practice that you would like to integrate into the daily life of your local church. You can find a list of suggestions in the download area.

Here are some general tips to help you as you pursue your sustainable practice as a church:

1. **Live** what you want to convince others of. This is the only way to make your case credible and for you to act competently because you have already gained experience yourself.
2. If possible, **find like-minded people** in your youth group or church. In this way you can present your concern to the pastor or the church board together.
3. Give the brothers and sisters in the church **time to test and try out** the new sustainable practice. We humans are usually more receptive to new ideas when we are presented with a time-constrained experiment. In this way we can gain experience whilst reducing fears. Afterwards, the willingness to make a long-term commitment is often much greater.
4. **Don't get bitter** if people don't listen to you right away. Keep at it and look for ways to raise your concerns again and again in a friendly and loving but also firm way. Change often takes time.
5. When your church actually takes the step, don't forget to **celebrate** what you have achieved. This will give you strength and confidence for the next steps.

Date I completed this challenge:



Access the download area here:

bit.ly/WOP22downloads



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

WHEN WORSHIPPERS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

Ekklesia is the Greek word used 109 times in the New Testament to describe the gathering of a congregation. *Ekklesia* is also the word used by the translators of the Septuagint (the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament) to describe Old Testament assemblies of God's covenant people (Hebrew: *qahal*). In doing so, the translators seem to deliberately have chosen a more loaded political term rather than a *cultic* one. Since the 5th century BC, *ekklesia* was used to describe the general assembly of citizens eligible to vote in a Greek city, the *polis*, thus functioning as a plenary assembly called to make decisions for the good of the city. This connotation may very well have been in the minds of the New Testament readers when they read about the *ekklesia* of Jesus. "'Called out' should therefore not be understood in the sense of being called out of the world, but rather in the sense of a 'plenary assembly' called together to address the concerns of the world."⁹

Think about the worship services or congregational life of your local church. As a church, are you aware of the needs of the world and do you think of ways in which you can contribute? How could we do better as a church?



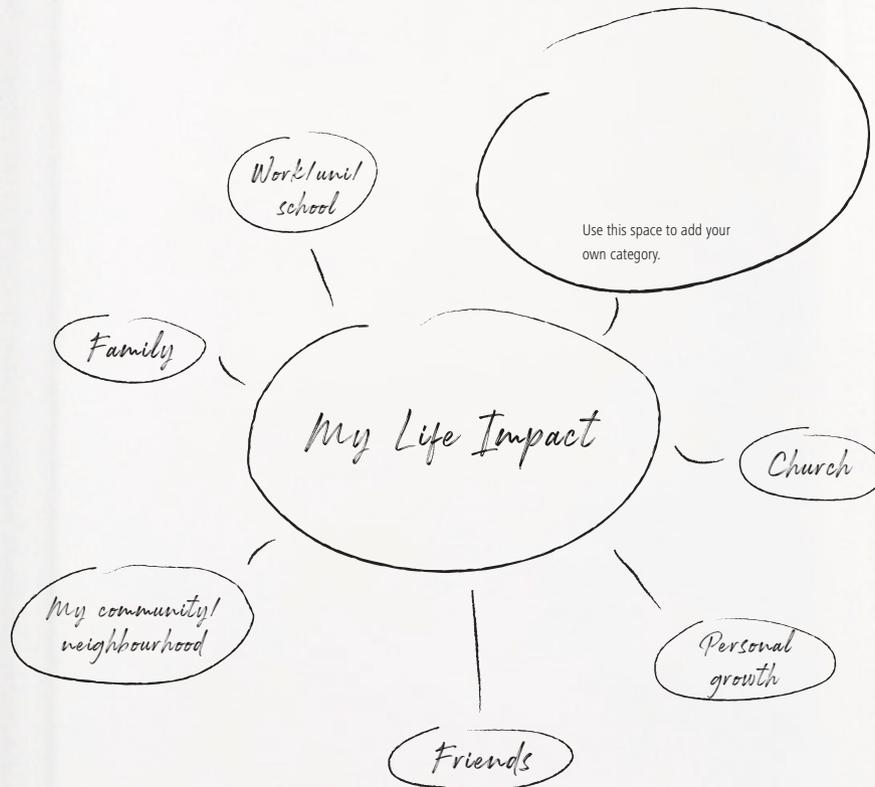
MIRACLES

Key Text

JOHN 6:1-15

ICEBREAKER**OUR LIVES MAKE AN IMPACT¹**

1. How have you made (or are making) an impact in different areas of your life? Use the mind map below to respond. (You can find an example to guide you in the download area.)



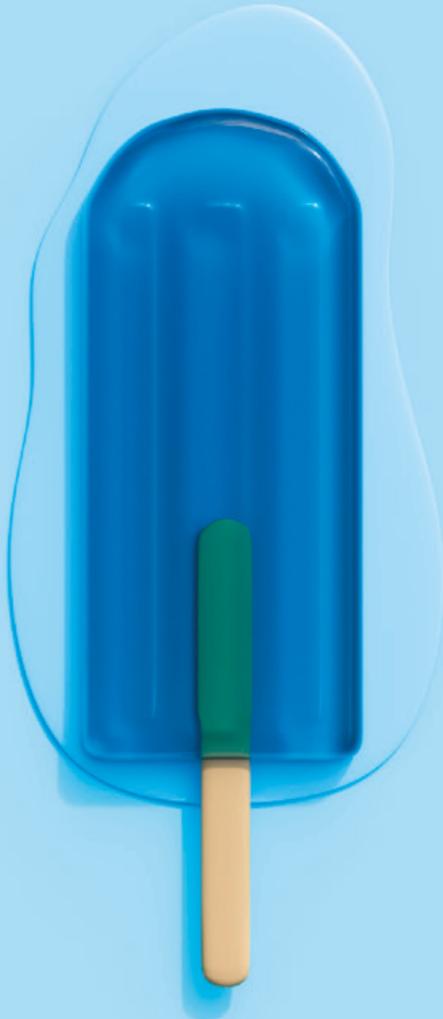
2. How did making an impact make you feel?
3. How did you know you had made a difference?
4. Were you surprised by any of the insights you gained from this personal reflection?

If possible, share your experience with others.

Note: You can find more icebreaker ideas in the download area.

bit.ly/WOP22downloads





“Reports from the organisations that regularly monitor [our planet] have been quite shocking in recent years.”

The oceans cool the atmosphere by absorbing about 90% of the Earth’s accumulated heat. This causes the water to expand and sea levels to rise, a phenomenon that is further exacerbated by the melting of ice in the polar regions. The oceans also absorb about 23% of the annual CO₂ emissions, but this causes a decrease in their pH value, which leads to ocean acidification.²

The consequences are severe:

- ✓ Ocean warming and acidification endanger marine life, especially coral reefs, which are home to more than a quarter of all marine organisms.³
- ✓ Rising sea levels threaten coastal regions.⁴ Houses and cities are increasingly flooded. Arable land is usually spoilt after it has been inundated with seawater. In the worst-case scenario, even the groundwater is contaminated.
- ✓ Worldwide, more than 800 million people have no access to drinking water.⁵ The warmer the climate gets, the more people will suffer from water shortages.
- ✓ Extreme weather events such as extreme heat, droughts, storms, and floods will be more frequent and cause crop failures, wildfires and famine. These will in turn fuel conflicts and force many people to leave their homes.

SHOCKING NEWS

All is *not* well with our planet. Reports from the organisations that regularly monitor it have been quite shocking in recent years.

The climate has been recorded since 1850. In 2019, the global mean temperature was already 1.1°C warmer than pre-industrial figures. 2019 is not an isolated case. The years 2015 to 2019 were the warmest on record, and since the 1980s every subsequent decade has been warmer than the previous one. Similarly, concentrations of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere peaked in 2018, with carbon dioxide at 147%, methane at 259% and nitrogen oxide at 123% of pre-industrial levels.

- Climate change is accelerating the massive extinction of species⁶ because many plants and animals can only survive within a certain temperature range.
- Finally, it is very likely that climate change will be exacerbated when the so-called tipping points⁷ are exceeded. These include mass coral bleaching, polar ice melting, permafrost thawing and the loss of the Amazon rainforest⁸ if we do not succeed in limiting global warming to 1.5°C. If we continue as before, specialists expect temperatures to rise by 3 to 5°C by the end of the century.⁹

All is *not* well with our planet, but *there is still hope*. Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation, describes our very special position in this reality as follows, “We are the first generation to fully understand climate change and the last generation to be able to do something about it.”¹⁰

FACING GOLIATH

When I talk to Adventists about the state of our planet to try and motivate them to do more to protect it, in addition to the question of whether or not it is even our responsibility, I often encounter the comment, “There is nothing I can do about it that will actually make a difference.”

In view of the huge challenges we face, I can of course understand this thought from a *human* perspective, but I do not think it corresponds to a *believer’s* attitude. This may be a bold statement, but I would like to justify it using the following three arguments:

- I believe that it is God’s will that we work to preserve this planet* (see chapter 1). It is His creation, which He loves. He has entrusted it to us (Gen. 2:15), but at the same time has never stopped caring for it Himself, renewing it again and again (Ps. 104:30). It is God’s will that all creation be redeemed (Rom. 8:20-21; Col. 1:15-20). If this is His will, shouldn’t it also be part of my being a disciple of Jesus?
- I am responsible for my actions and deeds, but not for the results.* There are several ways to ethically evaluate a behaviour or action. In our context, there are mainly two different perspectives. The first one is focused on results, on the success of an action. We call this ethical perspective utilitarianism.



“We are the first generation to fully understand climate change and the last generation to be able to do something about it.”

The second ethical perspective is that of Immanuel Kant. For him, a good deed did not depend on the results, but on one's will and motivation. Thus, a good deed would be guided by the formula, "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law." This is known as the *categorical imperative*.

Of course, I can understand that we ask ourselves *what* will change *globally* if I give up something *personally*. Especially if we notice that the people around us are not doing anything either. But I believe that the important decisions in life should not be based on what other people do. Instead, we should have the courage to do the right thing simply because it is the right thing to do—especially when we are convinced that it is in accordance with God's will.

We do that quite often, by the way. We tithe, even though we sometimes don't know exactly how we will make ends meet this month. We keep the Sabbath, even though we face

headwinds because of it. We believe in creation, even though the prevailing scientific model is evolution. We do things because we believe they are in accordance with God's will and are therefore the right thing to do, even when it means going against the current and when they are very likely to make no difference nationally, much less globally. So why on earth do we struggle to make our personal and church lives more sustainable when we know that our current lifestyle exploits people and the planet?

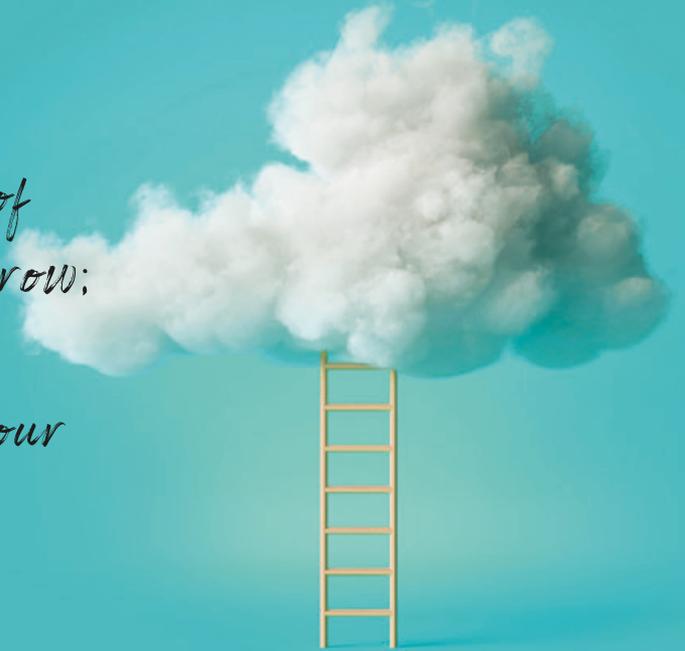
3. *I believe that miracles always happen when people take a leap of faith and trust that God will turn small things into great things.* It was Adventist author Jon Paulien who drew my attention to an important biblical principle years ago: in John's Gospel, miracles are always a collaboration between human beings *and* God.¹¹ At the wedding in Cana, there would have been no wine if the servants had not first filled the heavy jars with water to the brim (John 2:7). The lame man at the pool of Bethesda who had been sick for 38 years and could not even get up (John 5:5) actually stood up and gathered his bedding when Jesus told him, "Get up and walk!" The feeding of the 5,000 happened thanks to the five loaves and two fish of a young boy (John 6:9). And Jesus healed the man born blind by putting a mixture of earth and saliva on his eyes, and then asking him to wash himself at the Pool of Siloam. Only then did the healing take place (John 9:7).

So, miracles are a collaboration between human beings and God. For me, this means that, as believers, we should always trust that God will make great things out of the little ones that

"For me, this means that, as believers, we should always trust that God will make great things out of the little ones that we contribute."



“It may be that the day of judgment will dawn tomorrow; only then and no earlier will we readily lay down our work for a better future.”



we contribute. That is how a giant named Goliath is defeated with a sling and five small stones. Or how a school-aged girl succeeds in making climate change an issue in world politics by persistently protesting in front of Parliament.

For these reasons, I find it difficult to understand how some followers of Jesus would simply give up instead of facing the huge challenges of our time—the Goliaths in the room—or why they would not even join existing initiatives.

We can find hope in the words of another brother, a fighter of the resistance, who, in the midst of the cruel Second World War, wrote the following lines whilst imprisoned in a Nazi prison:

“In its essence optimism is not a way of looking at the present situation, but a power of life, a power of hope when others resign, a power to hold our heads high when all seems to have come to naught, a power to tolerate setbacks, a power that never abandons the future to the opponent but lays claim to it. Certainly, there is a stupid, cowardly optimism that must be frowned upon. But no one ought to despise optimism as the will for the

future, however many times it is mistaken. It is the health of life that the ill dare not infect. There are people who think it frivolous and Christians who think it impious to hope for a better future on earth and to prepare for it. They believe in chaos, disorder, and catastrophe, perceiving it in what is happening now. They withdraw in resignation or pious flight from the world, from the responsibility for ongoing life, for building anew, for the coming generations. It may be that the day of judgment will dawn tomorrow; only then and no earlier will we readily lay down our work for a better future” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).¹²

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, as humans we stand at a crossroads. We have the opportunity to save Your creation and future generations from great, irreversible damage. Please give us the determination and courage to face this giant Goliath.

QUESTIONS

"There's a young boy here with five barley loaves and two fish. But what good is that with this huge crowd?" (John 6:9 NLT)

1. **Have you ever experienced miracles? What did they look like?**
2. **"Miracles are a collaboration between human beings and God." How does that make you feel? Do you have any idea why God chooses to act in this way?**
3. **In the past, which of your ethical decisions have been guided by utilitarianism? Which ones have been guided by the categorical imperative? Would you choose differently today? Explain how and why.**
4. **Where do you show optimism like that of Dietrich Bonhoeffer?**
5. **What are your "five loaves and two fish" in the fight against climate change?**

A large area of dotted lines for writing answers to the questions.

CHANGE



Key Text

NEHEMIAH 1 AND 2

18:00

**Bert Seefeldt**

Online

< Chats

ICEBREAKER



Hola! My name is Sayei Méndez. I'm 22 years old and I live in Spain. I just finished my degree in Marine Sciences and I'm looking forward to working as a high school science teacher. I love being involved in Pathfinder and Youth ministry at my church. And I'm also passionate about the environment and social welfare, which I'm excited to talk to you about today.

In what ways are you or have you been involved in your community?

One thing I did for a year was to go into the city every Sabbath afternoon with my Bible study group to give food to the homeless. We talked to them and listened to their stories. We would bring clothes and blankets or help them to get their papers in order. I now volunteer for ADRA. Every day they pick up food from supermarkets and take it to a place where the City Hall helps people who are struggling financially. I usually go on Tuesdays because the youth of our church are in charge of that day. It's cool because sometimes non-believers come along to help. We get to help people and save tons of food from ending up in the garbage. I also occasionally help with beach cleaning, at animal shelters and at peace events organised by NGOs, such as A21, an NGO that fights against human trafficking.

Why do you do this?

I believe that every human being, every animal and plant, every beach, every mountain... is God's creation. I believe we are called to care for them. I know that one person cannot change the world, but I have seen how one person can change many lives! We are all called to help those in need and to live a sustainable lifestyle so that, in the future, people have the same opportunities as we do.

What have you learned from your experience?

Above all, I have become more aware of our world's current problems, such as migration due to wars, climate change due to our lifestyle, animal extinction due to our selfishness, deforestation... I have learned that, outside our church, there are many NGOs, volunteer programmes, protest movements and people fighting against these problems. We can learn a lot from their love and care. I have learned that life changes around you when you make a long-term commitment. And that you make an impact on the planet and the life of others when you pursue a more sustainable lifestyle.

Questions for reflection:

- ✓ What parts of Sayei's story do you relate to? What is strange to you?
- ✓ Have you been involved in similar activities? What was your experience?
- ✓ To what extent are love, care, environmental protection and animal welfare part of your experience as a disciple of Jesus?
- ✓ What would help you to get more involved in these areas?



A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY IS POSSIBLE

For change to be feasible, we humans need a mental picture of how things could be different. We need to know where we are going in order to get ourselves and others excited. It is not enough to simply be *against* something. To be constructive, we must also design an alternative future. Fortunately, there are already some good models available for the construction of a sustainable society. A very catchy and popular (and new) sustainable economic model is, for example, the Doughnut, developed by the economist Kate Raworth.

Unlike the economic mainstream, this model works within the planetary boundaries (see the outer circle in the graphic above). We already encountered these in chapter 1 and know we should not exceed them. At the same time, doughnut economics makes sure that *every* human being on this planet gets to live their life with dignity (see the inner circle). This is what an economy that preserves creation and strives for justice looks like. Because we can only create a “safe and just space” by accepting the limits of our planet and making sure everyone’s basic needs are covered (ours, our children’s and our fellow creatures’). This is something not only we wish for, but, as we have seen, also God.

TACKLING THE VISION

Tackling such a complex vision is not easy. It requires a lot of passion, hope and faith (see chapter 6), as well as courage and cleverness. These character traits remind me of Nehemiah.

Nehemiah was the cupbearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes I. Like many Israelites of his generation, he was born in exile in Babylon. Some of his fellow countrymen had already returned home, but Nehemiah himself had never been to Israel. Nevertheless, he was really interested in the living conditions of his compatriots at home and in the capital, Jerusalem. When he learned that they were in great distress and that the city walls of Jerusalem were still in ruins, Nehemiah mourned, wept, fasted and prayed for days (Neh. 1:3-4). But then he took action. He mustered the courage to ask the king himself to send him to Jerusalem with the task of rebuilding the city. Surprisingly enough, the Persian king acceded, and sent Nehemiah (a cupbearer!) on his mission. King Artaxerxes even provided Nehemiah with travel authorisation letters and an order for the building materials he would need (Neh. 2:1-8)!

Once he got there, Nehemiah found not only many supporters for his mission, but also opponents. He went through a rough patch, but in the end the city walls were rebuilt. His vision became a reality because:

- ✓ he did not ignore the existing need;
- ✓ he knew that the grievances were against the will of God;
- ✓ he had the courage to ask others, especially those in positions of responsibility, for help; and
- ✓ he was not discouraged by opposition.

I believe that these principles for change still apply today, especially in our commitment to creation and the establishment of a more just world.

“Without the appropriate structures, living in a sustainable way will feel like carrying a heavy rock uphill.”

BE A CREATOR, NOT A CONSUMER

What I have learned *anew*—in terms of my commitment to becoming more sustainable—and what I have *rediscovered with* Nehemiah is the principle of asking *others, especially those in positions of responsibility, for help*.

If we want to inspire others to adopt an alternative lifestyle, we must first learn to shop, travel, eat and live more sustainably ourselves. As the saying goes, “Be the change you want to see in the world.” However, individual and personal behavioural changes are very limited in their effect. On their own, they are not sufficient to bring about the change that we need to bring about as a society—for example, in the direction of doughnut economics or even to limit global warming to a maximum of 1.5 °C.

Like Nehemiah, we must be creators instead of consumers. We must seek to create structures that will enable us to implement our idea or vision; structures that will allow us and the people around us to live more sustainably. And we must dare to take the next step and approach those in positions of responsibility, those with the capacity to generate structural change. Because without the appropriate structures, living in a sustainable way will feel like carrying a heavy rock uphill.



CASE IN POINT: SABBATH, A SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURE

In the Sabbath, we discover a sustainable structure given to us by God that clearly aims to create a safe and just space for everyone.

First, we have the weekly Sabbath. God created it as a recurring ritual that reminds us each week of a few essentials of our faith, namely, that this world is His creation (Ex. 20:8-11), that we have all been set free by God (Deut. 5:12-15), and that we are not only to keep the Sabbath rest ourselves, but we are rather to share it with all our fellow creatures.

Then, every seventh year, the land is to keep Sabbath as well (Deut. 25:1-7). A *Sabbatical* year. In this year the land is not to be tilled. The land is to rest. What the land produces in this Sabbatical year is not to be harvested by the owner, but it is to serve as food for all people and animals.

Finally, after seven times seven years, that is, after seven Sabbatical years, the fiftieth year will be a year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-10). This is the year in which wealth is to be redistributed equally among all, so that everyone is restored to their original possession, their land, their livelihood. It is a year in which everyone is set free and they can return to their family.

“We can start making changes by implementing what the German NGO, Germanwatch, calls *handprint actions*.”

With the weekly Sabbath, the Sabbatical year and the year of Jubilee, God gave the Israelites a clear structure that would help them create a safe and just living space for people, animals, and also the land. And this is not just Old Testament nostalgia. Jesus made it very clear that this still applies to us when he declared it His mission on earth to proclaim the year of Jubilee (Luke 4:16-21).

CREATING SUSTAINABLE STRUCTURES

We can start making changes by implementing what the German NGO, Germanwatch, calls *handprint actions*. These are actions aimed at changing the current frameworks and structures, in order to facilitate a more sustainable lifestyle not only for us, but also for others. Here are several examples:²

- ✓ It is absolutely great if you eat seasonal, regional, organic, vegetarian or vegan food. By doing this, you are clearly living in a more climate-friendly way, and it is also healthier. However, you can have a much greater impact on the climate, the soil, animal welfare and biodiversity if you promote these sustainable criteria as the standard for the cafeteria of your school/ university, your church and even your youth events.
- ✓ Many people have become alienated from nature, especially in cities. To get back in touch with the cycles of nature and the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, starting a garden that is in harmony with nature (e.g. at school or at church) can be incredibly helpful. It will not only strengthen your connection to nature, but also benefit other people—those who do it with you and those who come after you.





“On average, every European owns about 10,000 items. Do we really need all that?”

- ✓ On average, every European owns about 10,000 items. Do we really need all that? There are certain items that we rarely use, such as drills, waffle irons and grass cutters. How about advocating in your street or church for certain items to be shared and managed communally? That way, we would avoid people having to buy everything new. There already exist many lending and exchange shops, public bookcases, sewing workshops and repair cafés that show how sharing and repairing things can work. All you need for these initiatives to succeed are low-cost premises and a suitable infrastructure. Wouldn't it be helpful if your church were to offer something like this to the community?³
- ✓ It is now widely known how harmful flying is for the climate. Still, flights are hardly ever questioned for school trips, business trips or youth events, even though in most cases there are good alternatives and exciting destinations that can be reached using other means of transportation. You could advocate in your school/university/youth club/work/church for a decision to be made to avoid air travel as a matter of principle in order to protect the climate, and to allow it exceptionally on the condition that CO₂ emissions are offset.⁴

CHANGE YOUR WORLD

If we want to live in a more sustainable world, our individual sustainable decisions must become a matter of principle and our one-off sustainable activities must become fixed frameworks and structures.⁵

As long as it is apparently more expensive—the social and ecological damage is usually not priced in—, more complicated, less socially accepted and, in some cases, hardly feasible to live sustainably, sustainable behaviour will not become the habit of the vast population, i.e., the standard. But it has to if we want as many people as possible to act and live sustainably.

Are *you* ready to be part of the necessary change?

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, it is often the existing fixed structures that prevent me—and others—from doing good. Give me wisdom to expose these and to shape them in such a way that as many people as possible are inspired to preserve Your creation and to live justly.



CHALLENGE

YOUR HANDPRINT

In order to help people discover their personal preferences when it comes to taking action for a more sustainable future, Germanwatch has developed the *Handprint*, which, in contrast to the ecological footprint, is not to be reduced, but increased. The Handprint is essentially a decision path that aims to help you figure out where you can start. Are you ready to discover how **you** can contribute to a more sustainable society?⁶

1. What issue are you most passionate about? Where would you like to get involved (more)?
2. How well do you understand how the system works and the decision-making processes? At what level do you imagine yourself bringing about change?
3. What is the best way to implement your project?
4. What allies do you need for this?
5. How many people can you make sustainable behaviour easier for?
My estimate: _____
6. Your first steps to tackle change:
7. Who could support you in your endeavour? Who do you want to address directly?

Note: If you are running short of ideas, you can find a decision path with a list of suggestions in the download area.

Date I completed this challenge:



Access the download area here:

bit.ly/WOP22downloads



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

JESUS AND HIS MISSION

“When he came to the village of Nazareth, his boyhood home, he went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord’s favour has come (Isa. 61:1-2).’ He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently. Then he began to speak to them. ‘The Scripture you’ve just heard has been fulfilled this very day!’” (Luke 4:16-21 NLT)

Make a list of moments in Jesus’ life in which He lived out His mission statement as stated above. How do they inspire you to bring about positive change?

LIGHT



Key text

MATTHEW 5:1-16

ICEBREAKER**THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX**

Dave Bookless, theologian and co-founder of the Christian environmental organisation A Rocha, argues in his book *Planetwise* that mission is not just about people but about the renewal of all things in Christ.¹ He then refers to “the five characteristics of mission”,² which you can see below.

What is your personal understanding of mission? Colour in the bars to indicate how much you personally agree with each mission statement.

The mission of the Church is *the mission of Christ*:

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers.
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
3. To respond to human need by loving service.
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.
○ ○ ○ ○ ○
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.
○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Questions for reflection:

- / What do you think about this understanding of mission?
- / How does this understanding of mission differ from yours?
- / Do you know your church's understanding of mission? What is it?
- / We usually read Jesus' Great Commission in the words of Matthew (see Matt. 28:18-20). Would anything change if we focused more on Mark's version, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation [*kosmos*]” (Mark 16:15 NIV).
- / How do you imagine a church that really embodies these five characteristics of mission?
- / Would such a church be attractive to you or your friends?

RESCUE BOATS AND AID ORGANISATIONS

There is a lot to be said about mission. What is mission? Where does it begin? Where does it end? When do we succeed? Are we obliged to do it?

In 1980, theologian David J. Bosch published a book in which he contrasted the two main views on mission. He was deliberately stereotypical and clichéd because he wanted each point of view to be clearly understood.

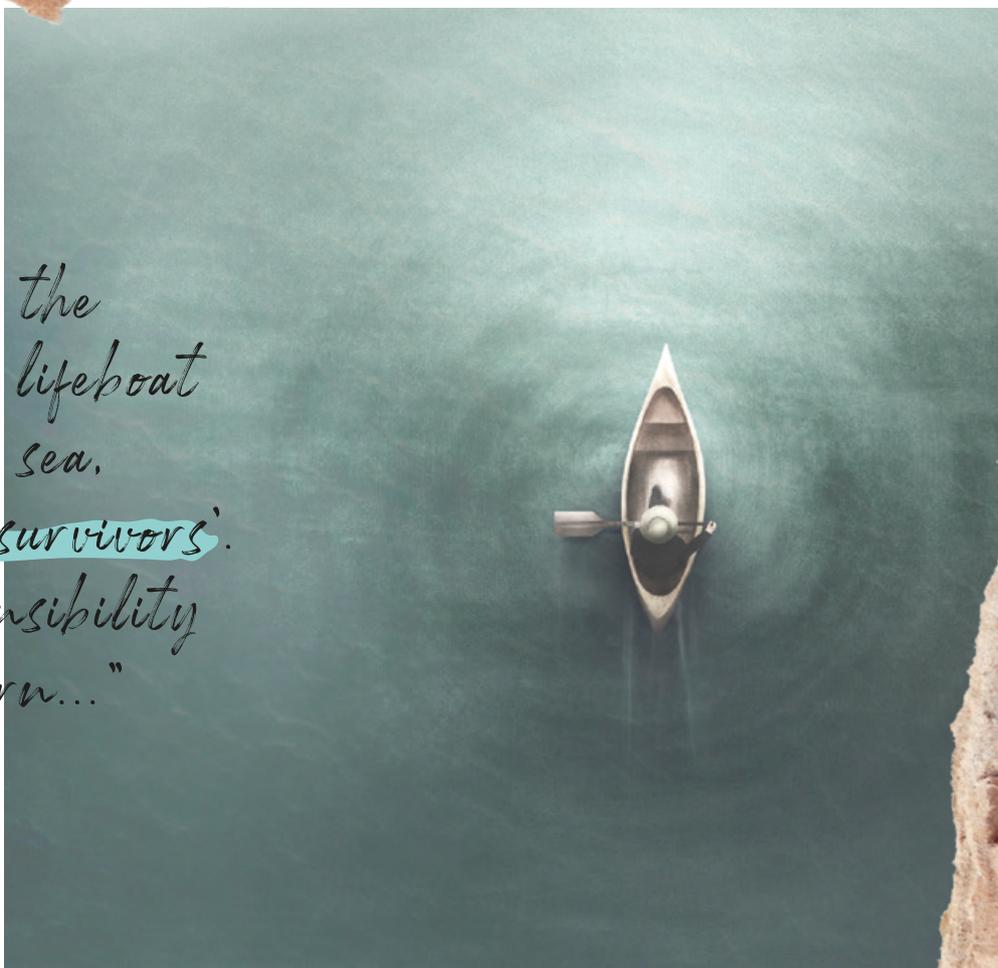
Bosch observed that for some people the church is “a tiny lifeboat on a tempestuous sea, busy picking up survivors. The survivors are hauled into the uncomfortable lifeboat where they cling together for fear that the waves might toss them out.” Their sole task is to rescue other survivors and wait for the luxury liner that will one day take them to a safe harbour.³ In this model, mission equals evangelism, because the only thing that matters is to win people for Jesus.⁴ Social responsibility is hardly a concern because Jesus is coming soon and society is doomed anyway.

For others, however, mission means being God’s co-workers *in the world*. It means being “*advocates for the world*”. It is about “bringing the future into the present as an explosive force”.⁵ In this thinking, salvation is not limited to restoring one’s relationship with God. It is also about liberating people personally and socially, in other words, it is about bringing *shalom into their lives*, so their well-being is a holistic experience. Unfortunately, Bosch does not offer a metaphor for this second approach, but it seems to me that the image of aid organisations is very fitting. For social criticism and social reform are important components of mission in this model of thought.⁶

“There is a lot to be said about mission. What is mission? Where does it begin? Where does it end? When do we succeed? Are we obliged to do it?”



“For some people the church is ‘a tiny lifeboat on a tempestuous sea, busy picking up survivors’. [...] Social responsibility is hardly a concern...”



My personal experience with and within the Adventist church—not only locally, but also nationally and internationally—has shown me that our church tends towards the lifeboat model. We are generally happy with leaving the aid organisation responsibilities to ADRA. However, I believe this one-sided missionary approach robs us of a great deal of missionary effectiveness. Because there are good reasons—both theological and communicative—for a church to also be an aid organisation.

GOOD WORKS

Jesus Himself describes His followers as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He calls them to let their light shine before men, that they may see their *good works* and glorify their Father in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16).

In the church context, we are probably tired of talking about works (good deeds), one way or the other. Some are very cautious about not falling into the trap of salvation by works and for this reason they practically have an allergic reaction when they receive any advice on behaviour. Others like to quote James (see James 2:26) to try and claim that our faith is an entrance ticket to heaven only if it proves itself in works.

However, in Matthew 5:16, works are not about salvation but about mission. Salvation continues to be a gift from God (*sola gratia*, remember? See ch. 2). What Jesus is clearly and unambiguously stating here is that it is our good works and not our good words that will lead our fellow human beings to *praise* God. Could it be that our actions speak louder than our words? Could it be that faith is better communicated when we not only talk about it but live it out? Moses tried to teach this principle to the people of Israel (see Deut. 6). And it is still a fundamental principle in youth work today: “A young person today doesn’t just want to hear you talk your talk, she needs to see you walk your walk.”⁷



“Jesus’ central message was the nearness of the Kingdom of God.”

What we have not yet clarified is what Jesus means when He speaks of good works. Each one of us probably has his or her own idea of what Jesus is saying. But in order to get closer to what Jesus or Matthew—as the author of the text—meant, I would like to look at the context of the text with you.

Jesus’ central message was the nearness of the Kingdom of God. Matthew explains that Jesus started His ministry like this, “From then on Jesus began to preach, ‘Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near’” (Matt. 4:17 NLT).⁸

In the very next chapter, Jesus launches His discipleship training with the Sermon on the Mount. He begins with the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), which outline the character traits of a person who is actively seeking the Kingdom of God. Theologian Bernhard Ott suggestively describes this person as someone who “dances to the music of the kingdom of heaven”. He summarises their character traits as follows:⁹

- ✓ *Humility.* To courageously admit that you are a creature who depends on and is in need of God.
- ✓ *Long-suffering.* Not just as a spontaneous feeling, but as an inner attitude that shows a deep concern for the hardship in the world.
- ✓ *Nonviolence.* Enabled not by blandness, mind you, but by a great inner strength.¹⁰

- ✓ *A longing for justice.* A longing for change and renewal; a holy dissatisfaction with the status quo (which is actually expressed in the subsequent character traits).
- ✓ *Mercy.* To act in the name of justice. In the Hebrew tradition, this is an expression of true piety (see Hos. 6:6).
- ✓ *Purity of heart.* This is often misunderstood as having “a sinless heart”. However, it seems Jesus is actually speaking of having a heart with clear, unambiguous and laser-focused intentions that are reflected in our deeds.
- ✓ *Willingness to work for peace and reconciliation.* We are not speaking of a passive peace (absence of conflict) but rather an active commitment to peace.
- ✓ *Willingness to endure opposition for the sake of justice.* Those who abide by these character traits will find themselves bumping into things from time to time. It takes a lot of inner strength to nevertheless continue to “dance to the music of heaven”.

It is after this that Jesus calls His followers the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and tells them that they should let their light shine before men, that they may see their *good works* and glorify their Father who is in heaven (Matt. 5:13-16).

It is clear to me that the good works Jesus is talking about here have something to do with the values He has just presented in the Beatitudes. And these values are better aligned with the view of the church as an aid organisation that denounces injustice and works for positive change than with the model of church as a lifeboat that limits itself to rescuing the shipwrecked.

God has called us to actively work towards justice and peace. He has called us to be stewards and gardeners of this planet. In a nutshell, He has **called us to care for creation**. Not only in our private lives, but also in society. In this way, we will let our light shine before our fellow human beings. Because people will see—by the way we live and what we stand up for—that we truly believe that this earth does not belong to us, but to the Lord.

“Hope is listening to the music of the future. Faith is dancing to it in the present” (Peter Kuzmic).¹¹

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Dear God, I want to be light for this world. I long for the people around me to recognise your love and mercy in me. Therefore, make me a person after Your heart and help me impact others with my life, my attitude and my actions.

“In this way, we will let our light shine before our fellow human beings. Because people will see—by the way we live and what we stand up for—that we truly believe that this earth does not belong to us, but to the Lord.”



QUESTIONS

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Matthew 5:16)

1. **Lifeboat or aid organisation: which metaphor of church motivates and inspires you more? Why?**
2. **How would you realise that a church also sees itself as an aid organisation?**
3. **Do you let your light shine before others? Do you embody the "good works" Jesus is talking about here? How are you doing that?**
4. **What convinces you personally, words or works? Do you remember specific examples? Share with the group.**
5. **Have another look at the list of character traits of a person who "dances to the music of heaven".**
 - / **Would you have expected other character traits? If so, which ones?**
 - / **Do these character traits speak in favour of a sustainable lifestyle? Justify your answer.**

A large grid of small dots for writing answers.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

WHEN CHRISTIANS TAKE THE EARTH SERIOUSLY

“When Christians take the earth seriously, people take the gospel seriously. [...] For many people the Christian faith suddenly seems to make sense when they see it lived out in relationship to other people and the whole planet” (Dave Bookless in *Planetwise*).¹² How do you show your fellow human beings that you take the earth seriously?

A CHURCH WITH A MISSION

Let's dive deeper into one of the icebreaker questions:

How do you imagine a church that embodies the five characteristics of mission (see the icebreaker on p. 67)?

This time, answer the question by focusing on these six aspects:

What **skills** are valued in such a church?

What **behaviour** is praised? What **behaviour** is frowned upon?

What **theological themes** are predominant?

How does such a church measure its **success**?

What kind of **programmes** does this church organise?

What **positions of responsibility** are particularly important?

Note: You can make this very visual by using sticky notes. Create six columns on a wall, one for each question. Underneath each question, add sticky notes with all the ideas that come to mind for that question. Finally, write down your conclusions and share them with someone in a position of responsibility (see chapter 7).

READING SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Bookless, Dave. *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World*.
- ✓ Keller, Timothy. *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just*.



CHALLENGE

THE ECO-FAIR FESTIVAL

We have now reached the end of what we like to call an “island experience”. We have spent eight chapters looking at issues of social justice and environmental protection. You may have gained new perspectives and hopefully made decisions regarding your next steps. It is now important to keep both of these alive in your everyday life, on the “mainland”, so to speak. However, as you probably know from your New Year’s resolutions, this is not always easy. For this reason, it is important that you retreat to an “island” every now and then to remind yourself of what you have resolved to do and why it is important to you. Such an island could be, for example, an eco-fair dinner or an eco-fair garden party where you celebrate and also make each other aware—once again—of what has become important to you throughout this study, what you have resolved to do and what has become of it. If you have been working through this resource on your own, you could also use this eco-fair celebration to share what you have learnt with your friends.

This Eco-Fair Festival is a fantastic way of trying out sustainable practices.¹³

MENU

Food products not only have an ecological footprint (production and transportation), but also a so-called water footprint. This is the amount of water needed to produce or grow the food.¹⁴ Many water-intensive food products require large amounts of groundwater, which results in severe shortages of local drinking water. And then there are the social aspects (fair wages and decent working conditions). Therefore, the menu of an Eco-Fair Festival must be designed taking the following criteria into consideration when it comes to choosing the food:

1. *Local and regional.* Short transport routes produce less CO₂. That’s why regional products are always more sustainable. Of course, it is ideal if you can use fruit, vegetables and herbs from your own garden or balcony.

Shopping tip: Visit your local (weekly) market. There, you can often buy food directly from regional farmers.

2. *Seasonal.* We have become accustomed to buying almost every kind of fruit and vegetable in the supermarket any time of the year. Outside the natural harvesting seasons, however, this is only possible if the food is cooled in an energy-intensive way or even flown in. Sustainable food is therefore (primarily) food that is currently being harvested outdoors.

Shopping tip: Use a seasonal calendar to easily find out which foods are freshly harvested.

3. *Vegetarian/vegan.* The production of animal foods is responsible for a large share of greenhouse gases and environmental damage. On the one hand, emissions are caused directly by the digestion process and the excretions of the animals. On the other hand, damage is caused indirectly by the production processes and the clearing of forests for grazing areas. In addition, farm animals are rarely reared in a species-appropriate manner. For this reason, an Eco-Fair Festival can really only be vegetarian or—even better—vegan (unless you know exactly where your meat comes from).

4. *Organic*. Organically produced food protects the environment by complying with certain standards, e.g. by not using synthetic chemical pesticides nor genetically modified seeds. In addition to looking for the European Union's organic logo on a product, you can look out for other labels with even stricter requirements (such as Bioland or Demeter in Germany).
5. *Fair trade*. Food products such as cocoa, bananas, oranges, rice, tea, coffee or spices often come from faraway countries and are sometimes produced under exploitative conditions. That is why it is so important to look for fair trade labels when shopping.

Shopping tip: You can find an overview of environmental and social labels at, for example, <https://fairworldproject.org/choose-fair/certifier-analysis/international-guide/>.

6. *Packaging-free*. Plastic waste has become a worldwide problem. We need to reduce our packaging waste as much as possible. An Eco-Fair Festival is therefore as packaging-free as possible.

Shopping tip: In many cities, you can now find shops where you can buy noodles, cereals and other food products with no packaging.¹⁵

CHOICE OF LOCATION

You can also save CO₂ by choosing a location that is easily accessible for everyone either by bike or public transport.

DECORATION

When decorating your eco-fair table, you can pay close attention to the following details:

- ✓ Gather twigs or flowers from the garden or a meadow instead of buying imported ones from a shop.
- ✓ Please refrain from using disposable tableware. If there is a shortage of crockery, everyone can also bring their own plates and cutlery. This will also ensure a colourful festive table!
- ✓ When using tealights, make sure not to use candles with aluminium holders. Candles in empty reusable jars also brighten up the table wonderfully.
- ✓ Use washable, reusable cloth napkins and tablecloths. If in doubt, it is certainly worth asking your grandparents.

CLOTHES

In the spirit of the challenge for chapter 3, an Eco-Fair Festival is of course the perfect occasion to show off your fair trade or second-hand clothes.

Finally, a very important note: I am convinced that the criteria mentioned above should apply to all our celebrations and gatherings in the youth group, the pathfinder club, and also the church. However, I also know that it will not always be possible to fulfil all the criteria. In some cases, you will even have to choose between two criteria. And I am also aware that we first have to learn to celebrate *differently*. Step by step. So, please don't be discouraged by the abundance of criteria. Simply dare to take **your** next step.

Date I completed this challenge:

FOOTNOTES

PAGE 3

- 1 This statement was adopted and agreed to by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Fellowship and issued by the Office of the President, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the annual meeting in San José, Costa Rica, October 1-10, 1996.

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Shell Youth Study 2019, Sinus Study 2020.

HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY GUIDE

- 1 Hans Joachim Scheelhuber, founding director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), *Selbstverbrennung: Die fatale Dreiecksbeziehung zwischen Klima, Mensch und Kohlenstoff [Self-Combustion: The Fatal Triangle Between Climate, Humans and Carbon]*, pp. 5-6.

CHAPTER 1 / WORLD

- 1 This icebreaker is based on “Mit den Füßen abstimmen” [Vote with Your Feet] from the *Just People-Kurs* by Micha Deutschland e. V., p. 141.
- 2 Göpel, Maja. *Unsere Welt neu denken: Eine Einladung [Rethinking Our World]*. Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlag GmbH, 2020, pp. 23-25.
- 3 <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/anthropocene/>
- 4 <https://bit.ly/anthropozoen-wortschatz>
- 5 <https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/planetary-boundaries.html>
- 6 <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol14/iss2/art32/> and <https://www.nature.com/articles/461472a.pdf>
- 7 <https://www.overshootday.org>

CHAPTER 2 / JUSTICE

- 1 Pufpaff, Sebastian. *Wir nach [We After]*. This is an impressive performance by Sebastian Pufpaff on the subject of justice. (In German) <https://youtu.be/TTS2KeBAGhY>. Accessed: 15 December 2021.
- 2 “Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. [...] And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word “righteousness of God.” Luther, Martin. *Luther’s Works, vol. 34: Career of the Reformer IV*. Lehmann, Helmut T. (ed.), Spitz Sr., Lewis W. (trans.). Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1960, pp. 336–337.
- 3 Unfortunately, Valuegenesis 2007—a European-wide survey of Adventist youth—revealed that there is a lot of confusion in our churches when it comes to salvation.
- 4 *The Poverty and Justice Bible*: www.justicebible.org.
- 5 “It is hard for us to understand how revolutionary this was in the ancient world. Sri Lankan scholar Vinoth Ramachandra calls this ‘scandalous justice.’ He writes that in virtually all the ancient cultures of the world, the power of the gods was channeled through and identified with the elites of society, the kings, priests, and military captains, not the outcasts. To oppose leaders of society, then, was to oppose the gods. ‘But here, in Israel’s rival vision,’ it is not high-ranking males but

the ‘orphan, the widow, and the stranger’ with whom Yahweh takes his stand.” (Keller, Timothy. *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2010, p. 6.)

- 6 *Ibid*, pp. 10-11.
- 7 *Ibid*, p. 32.
- 8 *Ibid*, p. 36.
- 9 Rentschler, Daniel. *Ein Schrei nach Gerechtigkeit. Ein Buch über Glauben, Menschenrechte und den Auftrag der Christen [A Cry for Justice. A Book about Faith, Human Rights and the Mission of Christians]*. Tobias Faix, Thomas Kröck, Dietmar Roller (eds.). Marburg: Verlag der Francke-Buchhandlung GmbH, p. 37.
- 10 Unless otherwise stated, the following information is taken from the book *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist*, by Kate Raworth. The author provides a well-founded overview of not only the successes but also the challenges of the 21st Century on pages 4 and 5.
- 11 UNDP, *Human Development Report 2019. Beyond Income, Beyond Averages, Beyond Today: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century*, <http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/human-development-report-2019>. Accessed: 15 December 2021. (Available in several languages.)
- 12 *Ibid*, p. 1.
- 13 <https://bit.ly/adh-armut>
- 14 Deutsche Welthungerhilfe e. V., *Faktenblatt Hunger [Hunger Fact Sheet]*, 2021, <https://bit.ly/whh-hunger>.
- 15 <https://bit.ly/adh-armut>
- 16 This challenge idea comes from Micha Deutschland e. V.
- 17 Keller, Timothy. *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2010, pp. 185-186.

CHAPTER 3 / LOVE

- 1 This is an adaptation of *Weltverteilungsspiels [World Distribution Game]* by Micha Deutschland e.V., Just People-Kurs, pp. 148-149.
- 2 “Chocolate companies still cannot identify the farms where all their cocoa comes from, let alone whether child labor was used in producing it.” In 2019, Mars could only trace 24% of its cocoa back to the farms and Nestlé, 49%. For more information: <https://wapo.st/3DBPfuD>.
- 3 Oxfam. *Schwarzer Tee, Weiße Weste*. <https://bit.ly/3EEsxmY>. You can read the English version of the article here: Oxfam. *Addressing the Human Cost of Assam Tea*. <https://bit.ly/31GSBz2>. Accessed: 15 December 2021.
- 4 Greenpeace Magazin (ed.). *Textil-Fibel 4*, 2011, p. 14.
- 5 Keller, Timothy. *Generous Justice: How God’s Grace Makes Us Just*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2010, p. 66.
- 6 For they go from Jerusalem, their place of work, to Jericho, their place of residence.
- 7 You can also find a list of other sustainable fashion labels here (in German): <https://utopia.de/bestenlisten/modelabels-faire-mode/>
- 8 <https://www.sedex.com/germanys-new-supply-chain-due-diligence-act-what-you-need-to-know/>
- 9 This challenge idea has been taken from the action week 2014 of Micha Deutschland e. V.

CHAPTER 4 / FUTURE

- 1 Commentary made by Helmut Schmidt on Willy Brandt and his vision in the 1980 Bundestag (West German federal parliament) election campaign.
- 2 These are taken from: Besser, Ralf. *50 Metaprogrammes*. Besser weit gut GmbH, 2019.
- 3 The Kingdom of God is mentioned 162 times in the New Testament. Mark uses it to summarise Jesus’ proclamation (Mark 1:15), and the Acts of the Apostles begins and ends its account with a reference to the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3, 6; 28:23, 31).
- 4 *Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>. Accessed: 15 December 2021.

CHAPTER 5 / CHURCH

- 1 Besser, Ralf. "WerteBegrenzung", *Das Kartenheft WerteReflexion [Methods for Uncovering Values]*. Besser wie gut GmbH, 2017.
- 2 www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action/transcript
- 3 By the way, this is the reason why the church has developed iCOR, a tool for value-based church growth and development that offers congregations not only helpful background knowledge, but also concrete tools with which they can discover their why. Visit www.icor.church.
- 4 Simon Sinek also points out that this bandwidth is needed because the Golden Circle has a counterpart in the biology of our brain. For example, the *what* is processed in the so-called neocortex, the part of our brain responsible for rational and analytical thought as well as language. The *how* and *why*, on the other hand, are processed in the limbic system, which is responsible for our decision making, our behaviour and our feelings, but has no language function. Therefore, it would be completely illogical to approach our why only rationally. Sinek, Simon; Mead, David; and Docker, Peter. *Find your why*. New York: Portfolio Penguin, 2017, p. 17.
- 5 See Rice, Richard. *Believing, Behaving, Belonging. Finding New Love for the Church*. Roseville, California: The Association of Adventist Forums, 2002, pp. 98-100.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 100-105.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 105-109.
- 8 Especially in Matthew, Mark and Luke. John describes the same idea in his Gospel using the word *life*.
- 9 Reimer, Johannes. *Gott in der Welt feiern. Auf dem Weg zum missionalen Gottesdienst [Celebrating God in the World. On the Way to Missional Worship]*. Schwarzenfeld: Neufeld Verlag, 2010, p. 33.

CHAPTER 6 / MIRACLES

- 1 Based on: "Ich wirke wirklich – Erfahrung mit meiner Selbstwirksamkeit" [I Really Make an Impact - Experience with My Self-efficacy]. Micha Deutschland e. V., *Just People-Kurs*, p. 161.
- 2 See WMO Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2019 (WMO is the World Meteorological Organisation), <https://bit.ly/WMOstatement>.
- 3 Source: <https://bit.ly/3Edldwv>.
- 4 According to the projections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the consequences of climate change for coastal regions will affect a very large number of people, "The low-lying coastal zone is currently home to around 680 million people (nearly 10% of the 2010 global population), projected to reach more than one billion by 2050. SIDS [Small Island Developing States] are home to 65 million people." <https://www.ipcc.ch/srocc/chapter/summary-for-policy-makers/>.
- 5 See WHO [World Health Organisation], *Progress on Drinking-water, Sanitation and Hygiene: 2017 Update and SDG Baselines*, <https://bit.ly/WHO2017water>.
- 6 Scientists estimate that about 25 percent of the species in most animal and plant groups are threatened, i.e. around one million species are currently facing extinction. Many will be affected within the next decade if we do nothing. 2019 IPBES Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services Report – Summary Brief for Business, p. 2, <https://bit.ly/2019IPBES>.
- 7 Tipping points can be vividly pictured by using a popcorn illustration. "It takes a long time for something to happen to the corn inside a heating pot. But when a certain temperature is reached (163°C), the corn kernels start popping into popcorn. Once started, this process cannot be reversed." Germanwatch. *Als wir verpasst haben*, <https://bit.ly/GWclimatecrisis>.
- 8 Lenton, Timothy M. "Climate Tipping Points - Too Risky to Bet Against", in *Nature*, Issue 575, 2019, pp. 592-595. <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-019-03595-0>.
- 9 "Climate Change: Last Four Years Are 'World's Hottest'". www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-46374141.
- 10 *Ibid.*
- 11 See Paulien, Jon. *Das Johannes-Evangelium [John: The Beloved Gospel]*. Lüneburg: Advent-Verlag, 2000, pp. 21-22.
- 12 Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Letters and Papers from Prison*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015, p. 18.
- 13 Campolo, Tony. "Er hat schon", *Party auf Zimmer 210* ["He Has Already", *Party in Room 210*]. Aßlar: Gerth Medien, 2006, pp. 178-180.
- 14 Idea by Ralf Besser, taken from the iCOR Moments Box.

CHAPTER 7 / CHANGE

- 1 Source: *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist*, by Kate Raworth. Finally, an economic model that doesn't destroy the planet.
- 2 These examples of handprint actions have been taken from www.handabdruck.eu. Visit their website to find even more (in German).
- 3 Leila Wien has compiled a starter kit on how to set up and organise a Library of Things (a place where you borrow things instead of buying them). *Library of Things Starter-Kit*: <http://www.leila.wien/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/LoT-Starter-Kit.pdf>. Also visit the UK version of the Library of Things: <https://www.libraryofthings.co.uk>
- 4 <https://klima-kollekte.de/en/>, <https://www.atmosfair.de/en/> or <https://www.myclimate.org>
- 5 Reif, Alexander and Heitfeld, Marie. *Wandel mit Hand und Fuss*, Germanwatch e. V. (ed.), <https://germanwatch.org/de/12040>, p. 10.
- 6 This decision path is based on the one developed by Germanwatch (www.germanwatch.org/de/17122). It has been only slightly adapted.

CHAPTER 8 / LIGHT

- 1 Bookless, Dave. *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World*. E-book ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 2008.
- 2 These five characteristics of mission correspond to the Anglican Communion's understanding of mission (www.anglicancommunion.org/mission/marks-of-mission). The fifth characteristic was actually added in 1990 in view of the ecological crisis.
- 3 Bosch, David J. *Witness to the World: The Christian Mission in Theological Perspective*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006, p. 32.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 7 Ostergaard, Soren and Hall, Simon. "Focusing Youth Ministry through Innovation", in: *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically about Youth Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2001, p. 216.
- 8 By the way, the word repentance is unfortunately a misleading translation of the Greek word *metanoia*. After all, the Sermon on the Mount that follows makes it clear that it is not just a matter of restoring the relationship between God and man, but rather that Jesus calls believers to "turn their whole thinking around" or to have a "complete change of heart". Ott, Bernhard. *Tänzer und Stolperer. Wenn die Bergpredigt unseren Charakter formt [Dancers and Stumblers. When the Sermon on the Mount Shapes Our Character]*. Cuxhaven: Neufeld Verlag, 2019, p. 104.
- 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–117.
- 10 Incidentally, the same word is used to describe Jesus in Matthew 21:5 (quoting Zech. 9:9), when He rides into Jerusalem on a donkey, and then mightily clears the temple.
- 11 Quoted in: Ott, Bernhard. *Tänzer und Stolperer. Wenn die Bergpredigt unseren Charakter formt [Dancers and Stumblers. When the Sermon on the Mount Shapes Our Character]*. Cuxhaven: Neufeld Verlag, 2019, p. 39.
- 12 Bookless, Dave. *Planetwise: Dare to Care for God's World*. E-book ed., Inter-Varsity Press, 2008.
- 13 The idea as well as many text passages are taken from the *Just People-Kurs* by Micha Deutschland e. V., pp. 164-165.
- 14 Visit www.waterfootprint.org to find information on the water footprint. For example, you can find the water footprint of certain foods (<https://www.waterfootprint.org/en/resources/interactive-tools/product-gallery/>) or calculate your personal water footprint (<https://www.waterfootprint.org/en/resources/interactive-tools/personal-water-footprint-calculator/>).
- 15 Visit <https://zerowastemap.org>.

CREDITS

The Earth is the Lord's: Called to Care for Creation. A Practical Study Guide.
Original Title: *Die Erde gehört dem Herrn. Berufen, die Schöpfung zu bewahren. Ein Kursbuch.*

©2022 Youth Department of the Inter-European Division
of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
Schosshaldenstrasse, 17, 3006, Bern, Switzerland
youth@eud.adventist.org

PROJECT DIRECTOR:

Jonatán Tejel

EDITOR AND PROJECT MANAGER:

Alexandra Mora

AUTHOR:

Bert Seefeldt

ENGLISH TEXT:

Alexandra Mora

CONTRIBUTORS:

Sayei Méndez, Karsten Stank,
Filip Kapust

DESIGN AND LAYOUT:

Simon Eitzenberger

IMAGES:

[shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com), [unsplash.com](https://www.unsplash.com)

Permission to print this resource is granted for local use in churches, youth groups, and other Christian educational activities. However, the contents of this resource may not be reproduced in any other form without written permission from the Publisher. The contents may not be altered in any way. All rights reserved.

*This resource is recommended to be used
as the Youth Week of Prayer for 2022.*

1st edition 2022
Printed in Spain

Unless otherwise noted, Bible quotations are taken from New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV® Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.



"I USED TO THINK THAT THE TOP ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS WERE BIODIVERSITY LOSS, ECOSYSTEM COLLAPSE AND CLIMATE CHANGE. I THOUGHT THAT THIRTY YEARS OF GOOD SCIENCE COULD ADDRESS THESE PROBLEMS.

I WAS WRONG.

THE TOP ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS ARE SELFISHNESS, GREED AND APATHY, AND TO DEAL WITH THESE WE NEED A CULTURAL AND SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION, AND WE SCIENTISTS DON'T KNOW HOW TO DO THAT."

GUS SPETH, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
UNDER PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER



As a global community, we face significant challenges. Social tension is on the rise. Our planet has a fever. And we are probably “the last generation to be able to do something about it” (Petteri Taalas, Secretary-General of the World Meteorological Organisation). Not only for us and our fellow creatures, but also our children and grandchildren.

How should **I** react to this as a follower of Jesus? And how should **we** respond as a church?

Scripture reminds us that the earth belongs to the Lord. And this has profound implications for the way we relate to others and to this planet.

This practical study guide aims to inspire you to develop a biblically-informed position on what are arguably the most pressing and daunting challenges of our time. We hope that this pursuit helps you discover what it truly means to be *called to care for creation*.



 **Seventh-day
Adventist® Church**
INTER-EUROPEAN DIVISION

Youth Department

of the Inter-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
Schosshaldenstrasse 17, 3006 Bern, Switzerland